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The Fighting Trapper; or, Kit Carson to the Rescue.

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAVELER.

THE noonday sun was pouring its full tide of fiery rays upon the broad rolling prairie; the blazing air was quivering with the intense heat of a summer day; the blue sky was not flecked by a single cloud. Away, as far as the eye could reach, the glistening plain stretched in regular monotonous swells, unre-

lieved, save here and there by some stunted tree or jagged rock; only now and then an emerald grove of trees met the eye like a refreshing oasis in the desert. The earth long had been scorched by the withering rays. Only at intervals the sparse blades of buffalo grass were to be seen. It seemed as if the whole face of nature was blasted by some deadly sirocco.

The section of country to which we refer is now comprehended in what is termed Nebraska territory. That portion in the neighborhood of the Rocky mountains, termed the "Black Hills," is the one of which we shall more particularly speak. Until recently it was rarely visited by whites, except by a few trappers and hunters. Now and then some adventurous man pierced its wilds with those

daring spirits, but only at rare intervals indeed. The Indians held nearly undisputed possession of this territory, which was, in fact, but one great hunting ground. Herds of buffaloes, numbering tens of thousands, thundered over its vast bosom; innumerable droves of horses galloped in unrestrained freedom over its face, while in the plentiful streams, the beaver and otter flourished with little fear of molestation from the white man. The whole North-west was the unexplored paradise of the aborigines of the continent.

The only whites who trod this region were the daring trappers and hunters, who, indeed, differed little in their customs and lives from the savages themselves. They generally traveled in bodies numbering from two or three to a dozen; now and then an eccentric and

fearless spirit might be found who braved the perils of the wilderness alone, and journeyed hundreds of miles with his peltries, with no companion but his horse and faithful rifle.

Although the prairie presented as cheerless and barren an appearance at this time as the desert, yet there were seasons when it seemed another country—when it was but one romantic ocean of verdure and roses, and the air was heavy with the perfumes of millions of wild flowers that bloomed and lived in the genial sunshine. For mile after mile the ground was covered with the thick velvet of green, in which the most varied animal life grew in myriads.

About noon of this suffocating day a horseman was travelling over the prairie. He and his animal were the only signs of life that met the eye, and they together might have been easily mistaken for some stationery object, so slow and tedious was their course. The rider was a young man of not over twenty-five years of age, whose well-proportioned frame showed that, although in all probability a stranger in those parts, he yet was no ordinary hunter. He was attired in the usual hunting-frock and leggings, and wore a closely fitting cap of fur. At his waist the handles of two knives protruded, and a long polished rifle rested across the saddle in front of him. His black hair, escaping from his cap, hung loosely upon his shoulders, giving him at times a strange and picturesque wildness. His complexion was considerably bronzed from constant exposure to all kinds of weather. His hazel eyes were now gazing vacantly at the horizon, and his mind was lost in a deep wandering that nearly excluded all external objects from his view. His horse, a diminutive specimen of the Canadian breed, although capable of bearing much fatigue, now gave palpable signs of weariness. His dappled haunches glistening in the sun's fiery rays like polished ebony, while the foam and froth was constantly dripping from beneath the saddle, as he patiently and slowly plodded forward. His hoofs clamping upon the hardened earth, the dry cracking of the saddle, and the hurried breathing of the animal, were the only sounds that disturbed the oppressive stillness that held reign. Such an appearance did George Summerfield present as he was journeying over the prairie.

"Heavens!" exclaimed he, collecting his thoughts and gazing about him, "when will this horrid scene change? Here I have been travelling since daylight, over this dreadful ocean of earth, and not a solitary island yet appeared. I am half tortured to death with thirst, while poor Ned here is suffering still more. Have patience, Ned," he added, fondly patting the horse upon the neck, who was indeed suffering more than his master.

"Curses on those infernal fellows," muttered he. "I doubt whether I shall ever see their ugly faces again, and a precious pretty scrape I am in. Two or three thousand of miles from home, with no neighbors but the cowardly Indians, who, I doubt not, would be glad to make my acquaintance. But who shall I blame but myself for this? Heavens! what a fate this would be, out on this baking prairie to be tortured to death by this consuming thirst. God avert such a terrible death!"

The horse stopped now and then to pluck the yellow blades of grass, and at last turned to lick the froth from his steaming sides. Summerfield restrained him.

"Don't do that, Ned, though God knows that you are suffering! It will only aggravate your thirst the more."

The animal ceased, and his rider rose in his stirrups and anxiously swept the horizon. It was growing late in the afternoon, and he began to be alarmed for himself. He felt sure that he should die unless he soon discovered water. Suddenly, as he gazed to the right, his eye flashed, and he started.

"Thank heaven, there's a sail in this infernal ocean, and close at hand, too!" he exclaimed, as his eye rested upon the mellow outlines of a grove of trees in the distance.

"What could have prevented me from seeing those trees before? They must have been in sight for the last half hour, while Ned and I have almost given up in despair. Relief is close at hand."

Summerfield, although quite an experienced hunter, had, however, sadly miscalculated the distance. The trees were full twice as far as they appeared. In his impatient haste to reach them, the time seemed interminable. Distance is as deceptive upon the prairie as

upon the sea; as it takes a true sailor to calculate it upon the one, so it requires an experienced hunter to measure it upon the other.

It was full an hour before he approached near enough to distinguish the branches of the different trees; and as he saw their fresh and blooming appearance, he felt sure that such a thing could not exist unless the roots were well supplied with water.

"And yet," he muttered, as the sickening thought presented itself, "suppose that I should be disappointed, what a death awaits me! I never could leave the spot, and poor Ned would die immediately."

As he rapidly approached the place, his anxiety became fearfully intense. He listened to hear the noise of running water, and when he heard it not, despite himself, an awful doubt would enter his mind. His horse's instinct, however, was infallible; and, as the latter quickened his pace and ascended the swell upon the edge of the grove, a bright, sparkling stream of water was seen gushing slowly along within a few feet of him.

With a shout, he sprang from his horse, and they simultaneously leaped into the refreshing element. As he quaffed the cool, refreshing fluid, he was fairly delirious with joy. It seemed that a death by drowning was the greatest bliss that a mortal could be given, and he covered himself with the limpid water, and was really insane with his excess of pleasure.

Summerfield, however, soon satisfied his desires, and, like an ordinary human being, laughed at his own ridiculous manifestations.

"Hold on, Ned," said he, "it won't do for you to drink so much at first. It is dangerous, and you must be restrained."

So saying, he led his horse from the water, upon the swell, and holding his rein, gazed out upon the prairie. The sun was now low in the heavens, and the air was becoming cooler and more tolerable. He saw no sign of animal life, and was about to turn to the grove, when the sharp crack of a rifle burst from the green spot, and a bullet whizzed within a half-inch of his eyes!

"Heavens! That was a close rub!" ejaculated Summerfield, cocking his rifle and gazing toward the grove in the hope of seeing his enemy. But no form was visible, and he began to feel rather uneasy in his situation. After waiting a few moments, he lowered his rifle, and at the same instant another was discharged, and, as a slight puff of wind struck his face, one of his black curls dropped to his feet, severed by the leaden messenger. He turned quickly, and saw a thin wreath of smoke slowly rising from the edge of the grove.

"There's a venture, at any rate!" said he, hastily discharging his rifle at the point where he supposed was his hidden foe.

As he commenced re-loading, he saw the underwood become agitated, and the next instant a large, powerfully built man stepped forth in full view. Summerfield gazed at him with mixed wonder and admiration. His form was one of the most noble and commanding that he had ever seen. His small eyes glistening beneath his shaggy, projecting brows, seemed ever restless with excitement. His jetty black beard, although long and uncombed, had yet an appearance of harmony with the rest of his dress. As he moved, the swelling ridges of muscles showed what terrible strength was concentrated in his frame. Yet he was graceful, and, when occasion required, was as lightning-like in his movements as the famished panther. His fine Roman nose, and small, restless gray eyes, would have shown any one his temperament.

His dress was similar to Summerfield's, save that it appeared to be made more for strength and durability. In his left hand, he held a long, formidable-looking rifle, whose barrel glistened and shone in the sun's departing rays as he slowly changed its position. The handle of a finely-carved scalping-knife was visible, and, take him all in all, the hunter was a man whose ill-will was dangerous to any mortal.

"It seems to me," said Summerfield, "that you are rather reckless with your shots. You made me wink rather suddenly a short time since."

"Wal, stranger, I ain't a feller what makes many mis-shots."

"Will you allow me to inquire your object in thus sending your shots so close to me?"

"Wal, stranger, that hyer's the manner I generally says 'How d'you do?' when I come across folks what I doesn't know."

"A rather peculiar fashion of yours."

"It's the one I allers uses, and what I allers ca'culate to. What mought your handle be, stranger?"

"Summerfield—George Summerfield is my name. I suppose you will have no objections to giving me yours?"

"How come you to be trampin' out in these parts?"

"I left the States some weeks ago in company with three others, with the intention of accompanying them upon a trapping expedition. Yesterday, in the excitement of a chase, I lost them altogether, and have not seen a sign of them since."

"Yer a green one, no mistake, in these parts."

"I have been here before, and am not an inexperienced hunter, although I am young. I have been in several brushes with Indians, and trust that I am not what, upon further acquaintance, you will term *green*. But, my good friend, allow me again to inquire your name?"

"I'm known in these parts by the name of Vic Vannoven."

"I have heard you spoken of as a great hunter and trapper that—"

"Thar, that'll do. Just hold on with that stuff."

"Why, Mr.—"

"Hold on agin," exclaimed the hunter, with an angry gesture. "I don't own that last handle. Jus please to drap it altogether when I'm spoken to, and never mind about stuffin' me with that other stuff. It goes agin my stummick altogether."

"Well, Vic, then, I have heard of you before, and assure you that I am glad to meet you. I don't feel entirely safe in this section with no companion but my horse. I suppose that you are alone?"

"I hain't got no *chaps* hangin' round me, but Polly, here, is worth a dozen. When she barks she bites; and I've got Porkypine out here that sleeps with me every night, and us three makes as big a company as I wants."

"Then I suppose you would rather be freed from my society?"

"Wal, Somefield, ef yer death on redskins, and that Polly of yourn'll drop one without yer touchin it, and ef yer ain't afraid of gitten' yer h'ar lifted, and don't mind sleepin' out in a snow-storm, and ain't womanish, why hyer's a feller what'll stick to you."

"Then we are friends henceforth. Now that I have your company, I do not feel the loss of my friends so much, although, if possible, I must soon see them."

"Whar was it that you left 'em?"

"I have no idea; but, judging from the distance that I have travelled, I should suppose it somewhere in the neighborhood of forty miles."

"What kind of lookin' place mought it be whar you seen 'em last?"

"I remember that it was at the junction of two streams, near a large grove of timber—"

"I knows the spot, and now am purty certain that yer *green*; coz why, you've been trampin' your old hoss to death to find 'em, and they hain't been more'n a dozen miles off neither."

"Why, how can that be, when I have travelled a much greater distance?"

"Coz you've been trampin' all 'round it without comin' to the pint, and ef yer'd had yer eyes open you'd have seen it too."

"Can we reach them to night, then?"

"We'll see; but don't let us stand here talkin' when yer hoss is wanderin' off."

Summerfield turned and saw that his animal had strayed quite a distance down the stream, tempted by the luxuriant grass that lined its edges. He gave him but a word, when he returned and remained but a short distance, while he himself rejoined the hunter, and together they entered the grove. After proceeding a short distance, they came upon the horse of Vannoven, which was contentedly plucking the grass with which the grove was carpeted.

"Hyar, Porkypine, is a feller what wants to cultivate yer acquaintance."

The horse raised his head, and seemed to fully understand that he was addressed.

"Somefield, it's a gittin' nigh onto feedin' time, and I s'pose you wouldn't mind helpin'. 'Pears to me that yer rags must set nice, bein' you've been washin' 'em with such pains," said the hunter, with a half-mischievous and half-contemptuous expression of his countenance.

"That was a foolish piece of business," returned Summerfield, blushing with shame at

the weakness which he had manifested about the water; "but," added he, "I was perfectly insane with the thirst that was burning me up. Heavens! I never wish such an experience again."

"Wagh! you'll be lucky ef you don't. Why, you, I've seen the time when I had to chaw all the bullets I had to save my carcass, after goin' fur days without seein' a drop. There are some spots on this perarie whar, at times, you've got to make a long tramp afore you git sight of it. Howsumever, I never manage to lose my reckonin' now-a-days, and either Porkypine or me knows whar to find it."

The shades of night were now rapidly setting over the prairie, and the grove had already become dark and gloomy. Vannoven commenced making preparations for a fire, while Summerfield returned to picket his horse for the night. This done, he again returned to his newly-made friend. He had a bright fire burning and crackling, and yet so concealed and screened that it could not be seen from any point in the grove, until directly upon it. A huge piece of meat was spitting and frying over the blaze, while the hunter was reclining upon the ground and leisurely watching it. As Summerfield approached, he arose, and removing the meat, severed it into two equal portions, and tossing him one, remarked:

"Thar's the last of one of the finest bufflers I ever dropped."

Summerfield, like a true hunter, relished the steaming meat, and devoured it without the least ceremony or further preparation. This hearty meal was partaken in silence.

The hunter arose, and scattering the brands, so as to extinguish the fire, again seated himself upon the ground.

"Do you not fear the approach of an enemy during the night?" asked Summerfield.

"Not much. I'd like to see the red what could git near me while I's 'sleep, without Porky smellin' him; and me and Porky has no secrets," added the hunter, with pride.

"Do you generally wander alone over this dangerous country?"

"I don't know what you mean by *alone*; but if you mean fellers, why I kin tell you, I hain't had much company fur the last ten year."

"May I be allowed to inquire your reasons for leading such a strange life?" asked Summerfield, beginning to feel an interest in him.

"It would take too long. Not now," he returned, relapsing into a thoughtful silence, which Summerfield thought it best not to disturb.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT-STORM.

A BEAUTIFUL night settled slowly over the prairie. The air seemed to possess an unnatural brilliancy and clearness, and the countless millions of stars glittered in glorious splendor. The Pleiades, Orion, and other constellations, blazed in wondrous strength and brightness, and the whole canopy of heaven had a gorgeous magnificence that was indeed wonderful.

Nothing but the almost inaudible murmuring of the streamlet, as it rippled over its bed, could be heard, save now and then the dull stamp of the horses as they changed their position. At intervals, a slight gush or breath of wind moved the tree-tops, and gently swayed the branches, and then everything relapsed again into the usual deep silence.

Summerfield lay on his back, gazing in rapt wonder and admiration upon the spangled vault above him. He saw the constellations slowly circle through the heavens, and watched their progress through the openings in the tree-tops, until their swaying confused him, and he let his mind wander off upon a sort of dreamy, aimless journey, forgetting for a time his situation and new-made friend.

But occasionally there were stronger and more fitful puffs, repeated at shorter intervals; and upon gazing upward through the branches, he observed that the stars were gradually becoming obscured, while heavy clouds were rolling tumultuously through the heavens. Although the heat of the day had been suffocating, it was now uncomfortably chilly, and was growing more so each moment.

Suddenly, several faint flashes illumined the sky, and presently the rumbling peals reverberated overhead.

"This is goin' to be a reg'lar snorter," remarked the hunter, quietly.

"That's certain. See how the branches are swaying! There it comes!"

As he spoke, the sky opened like one sheet of fire, and almost simultaneously with it came a crash of thunder that made the prairie tremble for miles around. Its awful voice, slowly rolling away through the heavens, sounded like the rumbling of chariot wheels; and when the plain was lightened up and shone out with sudden and vivid distinctness, the falling rain glittered like the spears of an innumerable army. Again and again, with appalling rapidity, came the terrific bursts of thunder, and the rain rattled like hailstones through the branches overhead. Summerfield had never before witnessed such an awful storm, and for awhile was overcome by feelings of awe and sublimity. He was about to speak, when the sky flamed out again in one blaze of shattered fire, and the trapper yelled to him:

"Kiver up and snooze, or you mought git wet!"

He wisely took the warning, and was not long in stowing himself away in his impenetrable blanket. Thus he lay and listened to the storm, which was raging at its greatest height. Huge spouts of rain were shooting down through the trees like the rattle of musketry, while the bellowing thunder resembled the cannonading of some mighty army. As it paused, at intervals, the roar of the brook, now a rushing torrent, could be distinctly heard, and the wind made mournful music through the limbs, bending with water.

The fall of the rain lasted but a short time, and Summerfield uncovered his face and gazed around him. All was of an inky blackness save when the lightning darted through the grove. Then the wet trunks glistened coldly, and the water shone with a glittering light; and when some gust of wind, stronger than usual, swayed the trees, they sent down for a second a perfect deluge of water.

The storm was as short as it was fierce. In a half hour more not a drop of water was falling, and only a faint flash of lightning could be seen at intervals. Summerfield, now that the deafening tumult around him had ceased, fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. This had lasted about an hour, when he was aroused by feeling a jerk at his blanket. He looked around, but saw nothing in the darkness.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a whisper.

"—sh! keep quiet," returned the hunter, in the same tone.

"Any trouble?"

"I'm 'fraid so. Injins ai' about, purty sure."

"What! in the grove here?"

"Yas, cuss it, yas; you ain't scar't, are you? I thort I'd let you know my 'spishions, 'cause ef I didn't, you mought get into a muss without knowin' it. Thai goes Porky, again!"

As he spoke, Summerfield heard his horse give a faint whinny and a stamp that convinced him that the trapper's suspicions were well grounded.

"Just keep docile now," admonished the trapper, as he stole away.

He crept carefully over the moist earth, and in a few minutes reached his horse.

"What's up, Porky?" he asked, rising and placing his head close to his ear as he spoke. The animal gave another whinny, and, dark as it was, Vannoven saw a body glide out of sight in the darkness. Quick as thought, he sprang behind a tree, and demanded, in a loud and imperative tone:

"White or red?"

In a second came the answer:

"White. If that ain't Vic Vannoven, then skin me!"

"That you, Jim?" queried the hunter, in turn, as the familiar voice struck his ear. "Come out here and show your carcass."

The next minute the two hunters met with genuine and unfeigned pleasure.

"What the dickens yer doin' here?" demanded Vic, good-humoredly.

"And what you doin' here?" asked the other, in turn.

"Why don't you ax me, Jim Wandaught, what I'm allers doin' in these parts. Yer knows well nough. I've been tramping 'round, and happened to drop down hyer to-day, and seein' as how thar's gwine to be a reg'lar ring-tail-roarer of a storm, why, thinks I, 'Ole Vic, yer'd better stick hyer till it's over; and so I squatted till you come a nosin' 'round."

"Wal, me 'n Sam an' 'nother nigger war out when we seen the blow gettin' ready, and made tracks fur this place, but war caught afore we got to it. Howsumever, that didn't

matter, as we toted' on till we got purty near here, when I 'cluded to take a look at things afore comin' here; coz, you know, thar mought be reds about. I didn't know what to make of yer hoss, coz he smelt me afore I did him, though I smelt sunkthin' that I war purty sure war you, Vic, and it warn't no 'fumery to brag on neither, I can tell yer. I 'cluded, as how thar war signs 'bout, and war just gwine back to let 'em know it, when you come 'round."

"Didn't yer have anybody with yer 'cept Sam an' tuther chap?"

"Yes; thar war a chap what called himself Summerfield—one o' these from the States that don't know nothin'."

"That's what I thort. He come 'round here 'while ago, and bein' kindly clever, I let 'im sleep in my bed with me."

"In your bed? Wagh! wagh!"

"Yas; in my bed. Don't yer know nothin', Jim? In the woods hyer, I mean; that's my bed. He's green!"

"Yes; he wanted to come so bad that I couldn't help it, 'cause I's 'fraid he mought boo-hoo himself to death ef I left him behind. He's a greeny; no mistake."

These compliments to Summerfield were spoken in a tone loud enough for him to hear, and, as may be supposed, there was not much danger of his trying to impress his companions with any exalted ideas of his own prowess and knowledge of border life after that.

Jim and Vic conversed for a few moments more, when the former started out to bring in his companions. They were snugly ensconced in the thicket, and soon joined Vic and Summerfield, to the seeming satisfaction of all. It was a pleasant reunion after a day of exhausting riding. A fire was soon rekindled, around which all gathered to dry their soaked garments and to warm their chilled limbs.

Let us, before proceeding farther with our story, refer more particularly to those collected there in that picturesque group—each relating his story of news and adventure.

George Summerfield, of —, Missouri, has been referred to, and with a remark or two we will let him pass. He was the son of wealthy parents who died in his childhood, leaving him with no relation except a sister a few years younger than himself. Naturally of a roving, careless disposition, he had only entered college to gratify a wish that his father had expressed upon his deathbed. After graduation he returned home, and spent a year in doing nothing in particular but reading and hunting. The next year he spent in travelling with his sister over the Atlantic states, and returned home again without any definite object in view. One morning at breakfast, he told his sister that he should take a tramp among the Indians, just for the fun of the thing. Then he hurried to Independence, gave a trapper a hundred dollars to permit him to accompany him, and the next day was out on the prairies, half galled to death on an old pack-horse! He determined to brave it out like a hero, however—and he did. He was gone about nine months, and was given a good taste of wild adventure on the northern trapping grounds.

After this, he remained at home for five or six months, when he determined to make one more journey to the plains. And for this he was wise enough to make some preparation. He purchased his own horse, and took Seth Potter along with him. At Independence he selected his own trapper—Jim Wandaught—a selection that he never regretted. As might be supposed, his sister opposed his entire determination; but he succeeded in gaining her consent, and with a light heart he bid good-by to his native state, and turned his face toward the great prairies of the Far West.

Victor Vannoven was both a trapper and guide, although for the last year or two he had not served in the latter capacity, and preferred to be only the former. Most of his life had been spent upon the prairies. He said he had no brothers, sisters, or parents, or if he had them, did not know them. For a number of years he had made most of his trapping journeys with no companion but his horse. Once or twice he and Wandaught had gone in company, but he generally preferred to be alone, and sometimes he would be gone for two years at a time. He was generally reserved and distant toward strangers, and his nature was never understood until a long companionship had gained his friendship. As we intend to make a companion of him, we shall omit a disquisition at present upon his many failures

and virtues, and leave them to develop themselves as our acquaintance with him progresses.

Jim Wandaught, a trapper, born in St. Joseph, Missouri, was now about thirty years of age. He was rather below the medium stature, with a fine, compact frame, as agile and powerful as the panther. He always wore a cap that came down to his eyebrows, and fitted so closely that, at a short distance, it might easily be supposed that he had no covering at all upon his head. His eyes were of a light gray, and their power was so famous that many of his acquaintances termed him "Eagle Eyes." His hair was of dark grizzled color, and so short that it was rarely seen except when his cap was removed. No beard graced his face, except a long, yellow tuft upon his chin, the rest being as smooth as an infant's. His nose was slightly Roman, and rather small; he had a fine set of teeth, which were always visible, as he ever wore a smile, or a half-smile rather; for he possessed the peculiarity that many persons have, of using but one side of their mouths when they wish to indulge in a silent laugh. He was good-natured, always communicative, and rarely taking offence at a slight or intended insult. He had experienced an incredible number of hair-breadth escapes and wild adventures, and his fund of anecdote was exhaustless. He was frank, open-hearted, and a man that could never be a hypocrite. He possessed a rifle of exactly his own length, from which he was never known to be separated, and whose qualities he could never laud too highly. There were many points of resemblance between him and Vannoven. He did not possess the great strength and majestic form of the latter, but was more fleet of foot, and his nature lay more upon the surface; it could be seen at once.

Seth Potter, as the reader has probably surmised, was a companion of Summerfield, whose father had adopted and reared him. He was over six feet in height, very lank and cadaverous, and with a form excessively crooked. His head and neck projected forward, and when he stood, as was his custom, with his arms folded behind him, his knees bent backward, so that his legs had the appearance of half-strung bows, his whole body resembling the letter S. His features were rather pleasant than otherwise, having a mild, blue eye, and an ingenuous, half-comical expression. His nose was very long, and his prominent cheek-bones prevented every one except himself from supposing he had a right to lay claim to any good looks. His hair was long and yellow, his limbs long and bony, and his whole appearance that of a wiry, nervous, and ungainly person; yet there were few men of the West who could get over so much ground in so little time. Give him rough, uneven surface, and there was not an Indian but what he could easily overtake—provided his wind lasted.

Sam Redzel had been Wandaught's companion for a year or two, and was as different in every respect as could possibly be imagined. He was somewhat taller, had fiery red hair, whiskers of the same hue, that grew in patches on his cicatrized face; an eye that glittered like a coiled black snake underneath his shaggy eyebrows. He was taciturn and sullen, often refusing to answer a direct question. The sight of one eye had been destroyed, and, being of a milk-white color, and always half open, it rendered his appearance more repulsive than it would have otherwise been. He had a habit of leering with his one eye, and of always contracting his brows, that gave one the idea that he possessed a hidden, deceitful nature. Whatever might be his character, it was plain that it possessed not half the good qualities of either Vannoven or Wandaught.

CHAPTER III.

A BAD CHARACTER

As the bright rays of the approaching sun pierced the foliage of the grove, the trappers were astir and making preparations for the journey that was before them. Vannoven had passed around the trees in order to see whether there were any signs of savages; and, finding nothing to arouse his suspicions, had returned and reported the state of affairs to the rest.

One of the number had kindled a fire, and a huge piece of buffalo was soon roasted. In a few minutes this was devoured, and the hunters,

placing their different loads upon these animals, started forth.

The storm of the preceding night had wrought a wonderful change in the face of nature upon the prairies. Where, the day before, nothing but a few black blades were seen, was now visible the velvety prairie grass, and in some places the wild flowers had loaded the air with perfume. It was an immense field of verdure.

As the destination of the five hunters was the same, it was agreed by all to keep company for a few days at least. The eccentric Vannoven had made up his mind to trap alone, and he was fully determined that none should share his company. Summerfield, with his companions, were on their way north toward the trapping grounds, and from Vannoven he learned that they would trap within forty or fifty miles of him. Yet, as we have said, he would accept of no company, and assured the rest that he should part with them in three or four days at the most.

For most of the day the ride was over the peculiar rolling prairie which prevails so much in the Far West. This has an almost painful sameness and monotony for any one save those who, for years, have been accustomed to it. Seth expressed his indignation every few moments, but little heed was paid to him by the rest, and the company moved patiently and quietly onward.

About the middle of the afternoon, Wandaught, who was riding considerably in advance of the rest, suddenly halted and raised his hand above his head. The sign was understood by the rest, and, without speaking, they reined up their animals and waited for further communication. In a moment he lowered his hand and started forward, the rest doing the same. All, however, now proceeded more slowly and with greater caution than before.

He had gone about a mile or so farther, when he again halted, raised his hand as before, and waited for the others to come up.

"What's the word?" asked Vannoven.

"Sign," returned Wandaught.

"What?"

"Kioways, and a big party."

"Which way?"

"East, and comin' this way too."

"Close on us?"

"Not very. They've bin round all the afternoon."

"Seen us?"

"Guess not, but we'll have to show ourselves purty soon. Thar's 'bout forty or fifty on 'em, and they're goin' 'bout as fast as we are."

"I s'pose we'll have to get into another muss," exclaimed Seth, indignantly.

"You needn't be afeard, Crooked Pegs," sneered Redzel; "that shootin' iron would scare all of 'em to death, providin' yer didn't lose it."

"I can tell you, if *you* were among them you would find there was no danger of my losing it, nor of the bullet losing the mark either," retorted Seth, stung to the quick by the contemptuous remarks of Redzel.

"Come," interposed Summerfield, "this is child's play."

"Mr. Greeney, wait till yer axed to put in your blab," said Redzel, and then to Seth, "How d'yer manage, gawky, to wabble 'bout on them pegs?"

"Very easy, I s'pose, as you may yet manage to see."

"Come, don't give me none yer talk," exclaimed the trapper.

"Bah! I'd like to know whether *you* think—"

Further utterance was cut short by a crashing blow directly in the mouth of Seth. He staggered back a pace or two, when as he tasted the blood he clubbed his rifle, and before even his assailant divined his intention, brought a murderous blow upon the head of Redzel that felled him like an ox. Summerfield sprang forward to interfere, as he saw the bloody track of Seth's rifle; but in spite of him, his assailant arose and leaped toward Seth. The blood was streaming down his face, adding a ghastly intensity to his passion, while Seth stood quivering and perfectly white with rage.

"Let them have it out," said Wandaught, stepping back and complacently viewing them.

"Yes, if they're fools enough to fight and scratch, why, I says, let 'em doot," added Vannoven.

"This is a fine state of affairs," exclaimed Summerfield, bitterly. "We are even now discovered by our enemies, and these two fools must employ their time in using their strength upon each other. If I can prevent it I shall."

He seemed as excited as the two combatants, and approached them with a determined air. Stepping forward, he placed his foot upon the breast of Seth, who was under, and almost throttled by his adversary, and concentrating his strength, gave a powerful jerk. The two separated, and, yielding to an impulse, he flung Redzel a dozen feet from him. The latter sprang to his feet, and, like a demon, leaped toward him. Vannoven and Wandaught, however, seized and held him.

"Come, Sam," said the latter, "you've done 'bout enough. You're makin' a fool of yourself."

"Let me alone; I'll have the blood of both of 'em, I swear. They shall both die!"

"Come, come, that's plenty, now."

But the infuriated man heeded no advice, but catching a rifle, cocking it, and raised it to his shoulder. Wandaught just knocked the barrel upward as it was discharged, and the bullet passed so close to Summerfield's head that he involuntarily started. He said nothing, but caught Seth, who was again starting for him.

Redzel, seeing that he was prevented from doing harm, gave vent to an oath, and sprang upon his horse.

"Remember, you'll hear of me agin!" said he to Summerfield and Seth, as he struck his horse into a gallop across the plain.

"Yas, and I reckon you'll hear of me about that time!" returned Seth.

The four stood and watched him as he continued galloping away. Once or twice he turned his head and made a threatening gesture, but said nothing. His body continued rising and falling and growing less, until it was but a trembling atom in the distance, and finally it faded from view altogether.

"There goes a dangerous enemy!" said Summerfield, as he turned and mounted his animal.

"That's so," said Wandaught. "Sam'll remember you as long as he lives."

"Yes, and I'll remember him," replied Seth, furiously.

"I'm sorry it's happened," said Vic; "but Sam has no one to blame but himself for it."

"The precious fool ought to have been shot long ago," added Summerfield. "If he ever has a chance to revenge himself upon us, he will most certainly do it. I expected, when I came across him at Independence, that we should have trouble with him. I wonder how Jim ever got along with him so long."

"I allers had to yumer him, and bear a good 'eal!"

"Wal, we're likely to have trouble from other ones," added Vannoven, with a significant emphasis, looking at the same time in the direction in which the signs of danger had been seen.

It was now growing late in the afternoon, and after a few minutes' consultation, it was decided to move forward a mile or two, where Wandaught said was a small stream of water. It was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, as it was more than probable that they had already been seen by the Indians, and the peril was indeed imminent.

The quarrel of Seth and Redzel had its effect upon Summerfield; yet Jim and Vic seemed to have entirely forgotten that such a thing had occurred. They rode together, and now and then exchanged a word in an undertone, and were wholly occupied with the safety of the company.

The company reached the stream spoken of, and commenced making preparations for passing the night. The spot possessed little advantage, although a great many disadvantages. It was in a depression in the plain, which formed a sort of breastwork around them; and yet there was not the smallest tree to afford them a chance to conceal themselves. The open prairie bounded them on all sides, and in case they were attacked by the war party, it can be seen that their chance was poor indeed.

Just as they halted, the sun sunk below the horizon, and darkness commenced settling over the earth. The four animals of the trappers were picketed a few yards up the bed of the stream, so as to give notice of the approach of a foe from that direction, while it was de-

terminated that Jim and Vic should act sentinel through the night. In answer to Summerfield's inquiries, Vic informed him that the Kioways were not far distant, and that in all probability they would be attacked before the morning dawned.

There was no danger to be apprehended before late in the night, and Jim kindled a fire without hesitation for the purpose of cooking their supper. This done, they partook of it leisurely, and extinguished it, and then began to make preparations in earnest. Vic passed a short distance down stream, while Jim went out on the prairie and reclined upon the ground; and, at Summerfield's earnest request, he was allowed to go a short distance in the opposite direction. Thus Seth lay down securely guarded upon all sides.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST RACE FOR LIFE.

It must have been considerably past midnight before the slightest sign of danger was heard. Summerfield had fallen into a sort of half-asleep and half-awake state, when the nerves are painfully sensitive, when he heard a peculiar whistle from Vannoven. It was slight, yet full of warning. He was about to start to waken Seth, when Wandaught touched him.

"—sh!" he whispered. "I've woke Seth. Thar'll be sumthin' dun shortly."

"Indians?"

"Yaas; they've been creepin' around for the last two hours. Thar ar about twenty or thirty only, and they tried to come down stream first; but they found they couldn't get past the animals, and they're comin' up from below."

"Well, what is going to be done?"

"Vic is down thar, and 'll let us know how matters ar goin' long. We ain't sartin of thar number, but they can't be over twenty-five. If they're less, I ca'culate there'll be sum fun here, for we ain't gwine to show sich a number our heels."

"Suppose there are more?"

"We must mount and make tracks. We'll move out to where Seth is, and wait for signals from Vic. If he says that thar are too many, we'll get on the hosses and wait for him; but if he wants to show fight we'll wait for sarcumstances to develop themselves. Move still."

So saying, Wandaught commenced walking in a very prone position, while Summerfield followed with the silence of death. In a few seconds they reached Seth, when there came a suppressed whistle from Vic.

"They're close on to us," whispered Jim.

In a second or two the same signal was repeated twice in succession.

"He's goin' to show fight! See that you're ready."

As he uttered these words, the rifle of Vannoven cracked, and they heard him yell:

"Give 'm blazes—the sneakin' devils," and the shouts and howls of the savages mingled with those of the hunter. At the same instant Wandaught leaped forward, followed by Seth and Summerfield, who in a few moments were in about as hot water as any one could wish. It was so dark that the Indians could only be seen when directly upon them; then they appeared like shadowy demons darting to and fro in agony. There was constantly the reports of rifles, and sometimes by the lurid flashes the hideously-distorted features of the combatants could be seen; then again all would be struggling furiously in the impenetrable night.

Summerfield, when he rushed blindly into the fight, came so violently in collision with a gigantic Indian that the rebound threw him backward upon the ground, and before he could rise his swarthy enemy was upon him. There is no doubt of what his fate would have been had not Seth come to his aid at the critical moment. Clubbing his rifle, he brought so terrible a blow upon the savage's head that the skull was literally shattered to pieces. The Indian rolled to the ground without a struggle. Summerfield sprang to his feet and mingled in the fierce affray.

The contest was as short as it was terrible. The assailants had not counted upon such a reception, and could not stand before the fury of the trappers. They had expected to find them off their guard, and hoped to scalp them with-

out any serious trouble; but they found their fatal mistake when half their number were slain, and, setting up a mingled howl of rage and disappointment, broke and fled in wild confusion.

"Whar's the Engins? Whar's the Engins?" demanded Seth, darting about fairly wild with excitement.

"Most of 'em gone to—" (naming a terrible place) answered Vic.

"Wagh! wagh! that's what this chap calls fun," laughed Wandaught.

"Blast it! it's through too soon. Why, it's done before it commences," said Seth, panting with a perfect fever.

"You needn't be disapinted, for you'll see 'nough of this 'fore you see the States agin, I can tell yer."

"Anybody hurt?"

"I never gits hurt in such a scrimmage as this," returned Vic.

"Nor me neither. How is it with you, Somefield?"

"I have hardly a scratch worth mentioning. I have had some rather rough usage, but I believe am more fortunate than any of you in escaping."

"We've all got some scratches, but nothin' worth speakin' on, less it's Seth here."

"Oh, I ain't hurt much, though I felt more'n one knife."

"Well, what shall be done?" asked Summerfield. "Shall we build a fire?"

"We can't build a fire, that's sartin, and I opine that we hadn't better wait till mornin'. Them wasn't all the redskins that ar about these parts. They thought as how these fellers here would be 'nough; but I guess they've found thar mistake, and now they'll come down in a perfect swarm, and I reckon we'll find rather hot quarters here. My idee is to mount hosses while night is hyer, and leave for other parts."

"That's the talk," added Vannoven. "You fellers just go bring the animals round. While me and Jim lifts hair."

As Summerfield had no desire to assist in the disgusting operation, he willingly went for the horses. He feared that they had left during the confusion, but they were all used to such scenes, and had not moved. Taking Vannoven's animal, the others followed until he came to where the two hunters were busy at their revolting work. They were joking roughly as they stooped, and, seizing the prostrate forms by the tuft upon the head, ran the keen point around it, and jerked it rudely off.

"Your horses are ready."

"Yes, I see. Ain't that beautiful?" asked Wandaught, holding up several scalps. Summerfield made no reply; for, although he felt a sickening sensation at the sight of the scalps, he thought it best not to express his opinion; but he could not help recoiling when, on account of the darkness, they were held so close to his face as to nearly touch it.

"Oh, you needn't be squeamish," added Jim. "You've got to git used to sich things. I should think you'd travelled enough in these parts to know the way to handle wild beasts."

"Now, Vic, you lead the way," said Wandaught, as they all mounted.

Without replying, the hunter moved forward, and the rest followed. They had gone a mile or so, when the faint streaks of gray in the east showed that the day was close at hand; and, for this reason, it was necessary that haste should be made, as in all probability the remaining savages were in the neighborhood. In the course of an hour or so, the sun appeared in the horizon, and the prairie was lighted up by the broad blaze of light. Summerfield glanced anxiously around, but saw no savages, and congratulated himself upon his fortunate escape. His hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment. Before he had time to speak, he was electrified by hearing Wandaught exclaim:

"Blow me to cinders, ef yonder ain't the whole lot!"

Turning their eyes toward the south, they saw as many as a hundred mounted Indians rapidly galloping toward them. They were coming without any regard to order, and their number appeared much greater—so great that the four hunters concluded at once that their only hope of safety lay in their horses, and that, could they not distance their pursuers, there was little chance of ultimate escape.

"Thar's a long run for us!" said Wandaught. "Shall we separate, or keep together?"

The savages were coming from the southeast,

and the trappers changed their direction so as to move in the same—toward the northwest. Vannoven took the lead, and his horse sprang away, seemingly conscious of the threatened danger.

It was now plain to both the pursuers and the pursued that victory must rest with the horse which showed the best speed and endurance. Vannoven's animal had been in such races before, and was never overtaken by another, and he himself was certain of finally distancing his enemies. Wandaught had twice come up to a foe with his, and had never been deceived with him. Seth's animal was similar to Summerfield's, and they both had some fears of their holding out in a very long run. Summerfield knew that, for a short time, he could leave any behind him, but he had good reason to fear the bottom of the Indian animals.

Vannoven and Wandaught's steeds started off on a steady gallop—such as they were capable of continuing for many hours, while Summerfield and Seth judged it prudent to save the strength of theirs, and consequently they gradually fell some distance behind the former. This had been continued but a short time when they saw that their speed must be increased, for the Indians were perceptibly gaining. Loosing the reins, they shortly came up beside the two old hunters, who seemed to feel no concern at all about the state of things. Nothing was said for some time, when Wandaught remarked:

"They're gainin', Heigh!"

The latter exclamation was to his horse, which instantly thrust its head forward, and increased its awkward but rapid gait. Vannoven's imitated him without any command, and the other two did the same.

The race now began to assume a serious character to all parties. Far behind could be seen the picturesque and fantastic figures of the Indians, slowly but steadily and surely gaining upon the trappers. Vannoven's animal was lumbering along on a sort of half trot and canter, with his nose pointing directly ahead and his thin tail projecting in such a manner that it was nearly a straight line from it to his ears. Vic himself sat composedly in his seat, with his eye fixed vacantly upon the ground a few yards ahead, his left hand loosely holding the rein, while his right rested leisurely upon his side. He seemed as though he was half asleep, while his horse was running at his own pleasure. A foot or two behind him was Wandaught, whose appearance was nearly the same. He seemed, however, more conscious of the situation, and now and then cast hurried glances behind. His horse travelled the same as Vannoven's, and kept about the same distance from him. Summerfield felt the most anxiety of any; not that he was possessed of less courage, but because he had good reason. He well knew that his animal was not one that could bear such travelling for a long time. Sooner or later he must break, and his heart throbbed painfully as he even now saw unmistakable signs of weariness. He, however, remained calm, devoting his whole attention to the management of his noble beast. Now and then he found it necessary to draw the rein, as he plunged too impetuously forward. He, however, maintained his position between Wandaught and Vannoven, neither gaining nor losing ground. Seth said nothing to any one excepting his own horse, which he was constantly admonishing to travel a little faster, to keep steady, and not let himself be overtaken by the merciless savages. He was several feet at the right of Vannoven, and also held his own ground well. In fact, when matters had thus come to the pinch, his horse began to show that he really possessed qualities equal if not superior to the rest. Thus the four moved regularly and swiftly forward.

Steadily the distance lessened between the pursuers and pursued. The savages felt confident of success, and now and then gave vent to fierce, exultant yells. All at once Wandaught gazed behind him and exclaimed:

"Thar it comes! look out!"

At the same instant several red tongues of fire shot from the foremost Indians, and their rifles burst upon the air. The distance, however, was too great, and their balls flew wide of the mark.

"Now," said Vannoven, "s'posen we try our hand, Jim?"

"Hyar goes," he answered.

The two suddenly wheeled their horses half round, and, raising their guns, took a quick aim, and fired.

"Whoop!" yelled Vic and Jim in concert, as they saw plainly that their shots had taken fatal effect; for, strange as it may seem, two savages, mortally wounded, reeled and pitched from their horses at the instant the pieces were discharged. The infuriated Indians, giving vent to their demoniac howls, fired again and dashed forward. The two trappers deliberately loaded, and again wheeled and discharged their pieces, and with the same deadly effect. They were used to such business and understood it too well ever to waste a bullet. The redskins, without returning the fire, pressed forward more determinedly than before, bent upon overtaking the whites at all events.

"Heigh!" exclaimed Jim, "we've got to let our horses do their best!"

As he spoke, his horse and Vannoven's simultaneously leaped forward, increasing their gait very greatly indeed. Seth's did the same, while the speed of Summerfield's remained unchanged. The latter saw this, and, hesitating a moment, suddenly turned to the left, and urged his horse into a full run.

"Good-by all!" he said, cheerfully. "Look out for yourselves, I'm in a tight place, and can't keep with you!"

He smiled pleasantly as they looked wonderingly at him, and warned back Seth, who turned to follow. The three saw that his movement was the wisest course, and they lost no time in idle words, but kept upon their own way.

"Now, Ned," said Summerfield, "do your best for awhile. Our safety depends upon you; and if you only show the rascally savages your true mettle, we'll give them the slip yet. What do you say, Ned?"

Ned said "I will," as plainly as an animal devoid of reason can, and so increased his speed that his rider saw with a thrill of hope that he was distancing the savages. When he changed his direction he had faint hopes that the Indians would not follow him. He was, however, sadly mistaken. As he gazed back he could see at least a dozen in full chase.

Minute after minute flew under the feet of the pursuer and pursued. For a half hour, Summerfield distanced his foes; then for a time the space separating him from them remained unchanged, but now he saw too plainly that his animal was giving out! The savages were gaining rapidly and surely. Nobly and painfully, however, did his animal struggle for his master.

"O God!" exclaimed Summerfield, "am I destined to die upon this friendless prairie? Is there no avenue of escape! Save, Lord, or I perish!"

Several times he thought of surrendering without further effort; but he too well knew the consequences of such a course, and still clung tenaciously to the faint hope that yet remained.

Suddenly he saw that he was saved? Directly ahead of him, he detected the white tops of a number of emigrant wagons. It was the Oregon trail they were pursuing across the continent, and he well knew that strong and friendly arms were there. Although far ahead, he despaired not of reaching them, but urged his horse again forward. Soon he could see the dark forms of the animals and men of the train, and he raised a shout—a shout that reached both friends and foes. The latter returned it, and fired their guns at him; and seeing that their prey had passed safely beyond their reach, they halted, paused a moment, and galloped away.

CHAPTER V.

THE EMIGRANTS.

THERE are times when it seems that Providence interposes directly in our behalf. We are sometimes almost tempted to believe that the days of miracles have not yet gone from earth, and are assured that hardly a person lives who cannot point to some day when the hand of his Creator was made visible—when he felt that something more than mere circumstances governed his destiny.

When a man is brought so near death as to despair of life, and is then saved, he is certainly in the best frame of mind to believe thus; and if ever a fervent prayer of thanks ascended to this saving Power, it did from George Summerfield's heart as he rode forward toward the emigrant train. He could not but believe his escape was miraculous.

His friends proved to be a company on their way to the wilds of Oregon. As may be supposed, they evinced no little surprise at our hero's appearance among them, and overwhelmed him with questions and congratulations, all of which he pleasantly replied to, as his almost exhausted horse slowly made his way toward the centre of their train. They numbered about a hundred, all told, and were well provided for the sufferings and dangers before them.

"Rather a narrow escape," suggested one of their number, looking up in Summerfield's face with a quiet smile.

"Yes," returned he, "rather narrower than I care about experiencing again."

"How far have you been coming at this rate?"

"I can hardly tell. I suppose over a dozen miles. Had you been a mile or two farther, I should never have reached you."

"What is the prospect of their gathering for an attack on us, now that they have discovered our train?"

"Very certain," answered Summerfield. "There are over one hundred Kioways in the baud, out on the war-path, and you may expect them down upon you this very night."

This alarming piece of intelligence was soon communicated through the company, but they all proved themselves men and women. There was a knitting of brows and compression of lips that showed the terrible determination upon the part of the men; and though there was more than one blanched cheek and quivering heart among the women, yet nothing of fear was said, and when Summerfield cheerfully remarked that whatever affray there might be, it would be a short and decided repulse of the Indians, there seemed something like cheerfulness to again pervade the company.

Our hero felt nearly famished, and yielded to their urgent solicitations to eat. The company having concluded to halt for the night, he dismounted, and seating himself upon the ground, waited for his food. He was weary with his long race, and the repose of security was not unwelcome to his spirits. He was at length aroused from his half sleep by a sweet voice bending over him.

"Your food, sir!"

The young man sprang to his feet, as if the word "Indian" had been whispered in his ear. There stood before him a very beautiful girl of eighteen, bearing in her hands a platter, on which steamed a savory repast. Instantly the blood shot to his heart like a thunderbolt; then it rebounded and spread over his face like a sunset glow. He was confused, and tremblingly took the proffered dish. His eyes met those of his fair purveyor, to find them struggling like his own, to find some other object upon which to rest, yet, like the charmed bird, unable to look away. It was a moment of mutual surprise and embarrassment—but why so, did neither know.

"Can I do anything more for you?" she at length asked, hesitatingly.

"Oh—ah—yes—as I was going to observe. I think so, too," he replied, not knowing to what words he was giving utterance. He saw a quiet blush and smile upon the face before him, that disclosed the beautiful teeth she possessed, and convinced him that he was making a fool of himself.

"If you wish anything, sir, just speak to this gentleman."

"Excuse me!" he added, blushing and stammering like a boy. "I misunderstood you. I believe you spoke of the weather. Rather pleasant, I think. Don't know but what we shall have a storm, however."

"I observed that if you wished anything, you had only to speak to the gentleman at hand," she answered, with a half-coquettish expression.

"Thank you, thank you, I will. My mind was so busy that I did not heed your remark. Excuse me, will you?"

"Oh, certainly, sir. I supposed you were deeply meditating upon something," she returned, turning and walking away.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the friend referred to, who had been curiously gazing at this interview, "I do believe now that you were struck. But you ain't the first one, old boy; and I s'pose it won't do you no good, for she's got enough fellers hangin' on her lips. But blame me," he added, sobering down, "I believe you're good enough lookin' to cut out any chap you're a mind to."

Summerfield, as he saw that he had been observed, blushed deeply, and at the last remark he felt a throb of pain. He hoped that the man would go away; but, on the contrary, he walked closer, and added:

"Don't blame you much, for she is a fine gal, no mistake."

"Yes—don't you think we're going to have a storm?"

"Ha! ha! ha! why, you're green."

"I confess," returned Summerfield, recovering himself, "that I was struck with her appearance, and was foolish enough, I suppose, to show it." (However, this latter fact was far from not pleasing him.)

"Wall, as I said, I don't blame you much, for there are a great many fellers who've got themselves in the same fix."

"May I inquire her name?"

"I s'pose so."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Miss Vennond."

"What is her given name?"

"I s'pose that was given to her."

"No; I mean her other name."

"She hasn't got it yet; though I shouldn't wonder if it should be Summerfield one of these days."

"Fudge! don't you understand me?"

"Yas, me and Viola both understand yer feelin's, and I must say that I am sorry for you," returned the imperturbable fellow with a great grin. "Any more questions?" he asked, deliberately seating himself by Summerfield's side, and giving him a pinch upon his arm. Summerfield thought it best to preserve his good humor, and so he asked:

"Where are her parents?"

"Her mother is dead, and her father emigrated to Oregon some years ago, and she is on her way to join him. S'pose you wouldn't mind seeing her agin?"

"Well, yes; I should be glad to," replied Summerfield, with a poor attempt to conceal his anxiety.

"Wal, come along, and I'll give you an introduc."

Thus speaking, he arose and walked toward the main body, followed by our hero. A few steps brought them to where the females were, some seated and some occupied. All except Miss Vennond arose, and busied themselves with something. She was about to follow their example when Summerfield's companion spoke.

"Hold on a minute, Viley; here's a feller what wants to get acquainted. Mr. Summerfield, this gal is Miss Vennond. Now, go to work," he added, turning and walking rapidly away.

Summerfield bowed low, and blushed deeply. There was a slight flush upon the face of Miss Vennond, as she spoke:

"Pray take a seat, that is, such an humble one as we can offer."

Summerfield looked up, expecting his companion to make some further observation; but as their eyes met, each changed their direction, and they were silent. He nervously fumbled his cap, but could think of nothing that would be appropriate. To his relief, she asked:

"Have you travelled much in this country?"

"Well, considerable," he replied, changing position as though he experienced infinite relief thereby. "I passed over this country some years ago with a company of trappers, and am now going over the ground again."

Here came another vexatious pause.

"I have heard," commenced Viola, "that an attack from the Indians is apprehended, and believe that you brought the information."

"Yes; I was certainly sorry enough to impart such intelligence. 'Forewarned, forearmed,' you know."

"Certainly. And I heard, too, that you narrowly escaped capture. Do tell me all about it."

Summerfield, now relieved of all restraint, gave a modest recitation of his adventure. It certainly thrilled him as he noticed the interest manifested by his fair listener, and perhaps he dwelt rather longer than was necessary upon the narration. When he had concluded, she asked:

"And you do not know what became of your companions?"

"No; but I do not fear for them. They were all well mounted, and without doubt effected their escape."

"Oh! this warfare must be terrible. How

I have prayed that we might be saved from an encounter! Yet I feel, and *know*, that awful scenes will be enacted before another day dawns upon us."

"I trust that we shall not have much trouble," returned Summerfield, hopefully. "I am confident that your force is able to repel them, and think it will be done in a short time."

At this juncture, one of the females approached, and, apologizing to Summerfield, whispered a word in his listener's ear, and then turned away. Immediately Viola arose, and said:

"You will have to excuse me, Mr. Summerfield. My presence is demanded, and I cannot refuse."

"Certainly. You must pardon me for detaining you thus long. But the minutes have seemed as seconds, and I little dreamt that it was thus late."

"No apology is necessary, for I labored under the same mistake. Pleasure made me forget time."

Summerfield arose, and added:

"As the evening is so close at hand, I suppose that we shall not see each other till morning—"

"—If then," said she, gazing into his face.

"Oh! I see I am more hopeful than you are. At any rate, I will only bid you a short good-by."

She extended her hand, and as he took it he felt that it was in a perfect quiver.

"Good-by, then Miss—"

"Viola, I think, is better."

"Well, good-by, Viola, and God be with you." He felt his pressure returned, and heard her low reply. Ah! that pressure sealed the business with both. As for Viola, she wondered at her forwardness, and yet did not regret it, and Summerfield confessed to himself that his heart was lost—lost beyond recovery.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

At last the darkness settled over the prairie, and the emigrants commenced their preparations for the attack that each knew would be made ere another sun should dawn upon them. The wagons were arranged in the form of a circle around another which held the females, and within this circle the animals were placed, to prevent a stampede during the confusion. There were some thirty or forty men, most of whom were connected by ties of blood, and most of whom had something more than their own lives at stake. They had wives and children whose fate depended upon the issue of the coming contest, and there was a resolution shown by its own fearful calmness, by the compressed brows and set teeth, by the forms gliding silently back and forth, that they would either die or conquer.

As soon as it was fairly dark the sentinels took their stations. These numbered all the men, who placed themselves around the outside circle, where they stood with fingers on the trigger, waiting and expecting the slightest sound or movement to be a signal from their deadliest foes. The night was intensely dark, so that an enemy might approach within a few feet without being discovered by the eye of the keenest hunter. Summerfield took the point from which he judged the onslaught would most probably be made, and brought the most subtle powers of his being into play, in surmising the course that would most probably be pursued. He formed his conclusions, which in the end proved correct.

Several times he was upon the point of darting to the wagon containing the females, for the purpose of reassuring them, but prudence restrained him, and he remained at his post. He did not know but that the Indians were waiting for some such negligence upon the part of the sentinels to commence the contest. They had done such things more than once before.

Summerfield's nearest friend was a few yards off, and of course invisible in the darkness. Several times they exchanged a word or two, but it was agreed, after a while, to remain silent, as their situations might be betrayed to the savages by the slightest inadvertency on their part.

In about an hour the darkness seemed to lessen, so that objects could be distinguished a

few feet distant. Summerfield had remained listening intently during this time, but hearing no sound of danger, he was about to risk a word with his friend, when he fancied he heard a noise as if of some one gliding upon the ground. He peered forward, and was certain that he saw a human form flat upon the earth. He waited a moment, and then saw it hitch forward, toward the next wagon. Hardly knowing what to make of this he stepped forward toward it, when it suddenly leaped to its feet and sprang away. He would have fired had he been certain that it was a savage, but he feared that it was one of the emigrants, who had adopted this *ruse* to see whether a proper watch was kept. However, as it was, he concluded to give the signal of danger, and accordingly, placing his hand to his mouth he gave two short, trembling sounds, loud enough to be heard by all, and his surprise was great upon hearing it returned by several, thus showing that he was not the only one who had detected danger. He determined to speak to his neighbor.

"Say, friend, have you heard—"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a thousand terrific yells and shrieks, that sent the blood shivering back to his heart! Then came the deafening crash of fire-arms, the whizzing of bullets, and shouts as though a legion of demons were struggling for life. He saw shadowy forms springing and leaping around him, and in a second he was in the midst of the fiercest fight that he ever witnessed. Some half a hundred Indians had made a rush, expecting to carry everything before them, but were received at the very muzzle of the rifle. The savages were determined to break through the circle and drive off the horses, and slaughter the women and children, and the whites inwardly swore that not one should accomplish this unless it was over their dead bodies. At the first second the guns were discharged, and drawing their knives, the two parties fought like tigers. Summerfield felt fired by the contest, and in a wild ecstasy of excitement he leaped forward, and in an instant was grappled in with a powerful, swarthy savage. Together they rolled to the earth, the savage desperately endeavoring to wrench the rifle from Summerfield, who, strangely enough, had not yet discharged it.

Numbers rushed over the prostrate, writhing bodies, but noticed them not. Before they were aware of it, they had risen to their feet, and still continued twisting and striving for the rifle. One hand of the savage was closed around the barrel at about half the distance from the muzzle to the breach, and the other was upon the stock, while Summerfield's right was upon the lock and his left upon the end of the barrel. Quick as lightning he thrust his left hand forward, forcing the muzzle in the face of the savage, and raising the hammer, the rifle discharged its contents through the head of the savage!

At this very instant the Indians made a break and rushed into the circle, and now indeed commenced the struggle of life and death! The whites well knew their situation, and as fiercely and madly rushed they among them; thus in a moment they were driven tumultuously back with half their number either dead or in their death agonies upon the ground. But this was not accomplished until the second wagon had been reached and its inmates scattered! Thinking that all hope was gone, many of the women and children rushed out, and in the confusion several were slain and captured, and among the latter was Viola Vendond! Summerfield had an instinctive knowledge or presentiment that she was in danger, and sprang toward the wagon. Just as he reached it, he heard his name called in frenzied accents, and turned to rush in the direction from which it came, when he felt that he was shot, and, as his brain reeled, he fell to the earth.

When he recovered, the noise of the battle had entirely ceased, and in its place he heard the moans and struggles of the dying around him. As he arose to his feet, he found that he had been severely wounded in the side, but in the state of his feelings he felt but little pain. Several fires had been kindled; the wounded were placed beside them and guarded and watched by their mourning friends. Summerfield passed hurriedly around the circle, and in answer to his anxious inquiries was told that Viola, with several others, had been carried away by the Indians. It is true that this was what he had expected, yet he felt nearly overcome by the intelligence.

He examined his own wound, and found that it was necessary to attend to it immediately. The others were all occupied, and, without seeking assistance, he bandaged it as well as possible under the circumstances, and then passed among the others to see what assistance he could render.

At last the morning broke and showed the full horrors of the night's events, yet Summerfield was glad to find it was not so bad as he had feared. It was found that but five of the emigrants had died, while nearly all of the rest were wounded, yet none mortally. Two females, besides Viola, had been carried away. Nearly twenty savages lay stark dead around, showing how dreadful and fearful the contest had been. A few of the animals had been killed, yet not enough to seriously disable the company. A large grave was dug, into which the five bodies were placed and covered up, when preparations were made to resume their mournful march.

The bodies of the Indians were left lying above ground, where, in the clear air, they might preserve their form and every feature for many a long month, and about noon the train set out upon their gloomy march.

Summerfield debated long whether to accompany them or not, but at last decided to leave them. The distance to Oregon was great, and there was, in fact, nothing to draw him thither, while he experienced a desire to not leave the neighborhood in which he supposed Viola to be. He believed that the tribe which had captured her was at no great distance, and that it was in his power to rescue her. Accordingly he bade his friends adieu, and changed his direction more to the north, hoping to intercept or come upon Vannover and the rest.

A lover—especially a young one—rarely possesses more reason and foresight than he should, and it was not at all strange that Summerfield should indulge in some wild and improbable speculations, and form wilder and more improbable determinations. As soon as he was free from the caravan, he reined his horse into a slow walk, rested his arms upon his sides, and commenced meditating. It is not to be denied that hours flew past, yet found him undecided. Night drew slowly on, yet there was nothing in sight but the endless, boundless prairie.

Casting a glance around the darkening horizon, and seeing nothing but the monotonous roll of the plain, he halted, dismounted, and prepared for his comfortless rest. First, he turned his horse loose, cautioning him to remain within hailing distance, and then spread his blanket upon the earth. Then he looked at it a moment, and lying down upon one edge and coiling himself up, took hold of it with his hand, and rolling over several times, he was so completely wrapped up that nothing but his head was visible. His wound so pained him that he was compelled to lie in a certain position to secure a comfortable sleep.

For a long time he lay, giving full scope to his airy imagination, and forming new and even wilder determinations, until, feeling the drowsiness of slumber coming over him, he invoked the watchfulness of Heaven, and was soon oblivious to all external things.

He had slept probably an hour or so, when, from some cause unknown to himself, he awoke. He supposed he must have changed his position during sleep so as to pain his wound, and thus cause him to be disturbed; and, after lying quietly a few moments, he again fell asleep. A few minutes after, he again awoke in a perfect shiver of terror, just as he had reached the culminating point of a horrible dream. Although believing his wound was the cause of it, still he experienced a peculiar dread, that led him to draw his blanket more closely around him, and prevent himself from looking out to see whether there was any cause for alarm.

He lay quietly, endeavoring to fall asleep, when his heart leaped as he heard, not far off, the sound of footsteps! At first he thought it might be his horse; but he was too well acquainted with his step to be deceived. He was confident that human beings were around him. It was they who had awaked him.

For a moment he hardly breathed, listening so intently. Then, as a faint hope that he might not have been discovered began to spring up, he felt some one pull rudely at his blanket, and as it came off, he looked up and saw a number of dusky forms around him.

"Eh, white! dog! burn!" said one, closing

his bony fingers upon his arm like rods of iron, and actually lifting him to his feet. Summerfield said nothing, but suffered himself to be led silently away.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTIVITY.

PERHAPS Summerfield's state of mind may be imagined, as the overwhelming sense of his condition came upon him. His dejection and melancholy were painful, and he had, in fact, been suddenly hurled from his airy regions of bliss to the chilling reality of woe—a transition from hope to despair.

His captors jerked him rudely forward, giving vent at intervals to fierce and malignant curses and threats in broken English; and their expressions of hate and intended vengeance were so constant, that he realized too well the fate intended for him. One of them had secured his horse, although all were mounted. He was placed upon one of the Indian beasts, and with a wary enemy upon either side, they broke into a canter and struck toward the southwest.

The savages who had thus come upon and captured Summerfield, belonged to the Pawnee tribe, and were a portion of a war party. They numbered but five, who had voluntarily separated themselves from the main body during the day, and were returning toward home, when they discovered a solitary horseman proceeding leisurely over the prairie. At first they were disposed to shoot him down, but, as he did not appear to know that he was observed, they concluded to capture him by stratagem, if possible. Accordingly, they kept him in sight until night, when they set rapidly forward, and late in the night, came directly upon him, sleeping upon the earth. One or two proposed to tomahawk and scalp him as he lay asleep; but, after a short consultation, it was determined to capture and reserve him for the torture. This was successfully accomplished, and they set out to reach their tribe.

The captors journeyed forward, after a time, without exchanging words, save now and then to utter some warning threat to Summerfield, when they judged that there was danger of his not fully realizing the pleasures that were in store for him; yet their glances seemed to grow more baleful and demoniac at every step, and the captive concluded that, if there were ever devils incarnate, they were now beside him. They continued in nearly a due northwest direction, sometimes, however, proceeding more to the north, until noon, when they halted for a few minutes. This was only to breathe their horses, for they partook of no food, and were shortly *en route* again. In the afternoon they forded several streams of considerable size, and reached a country of a much wilder and more romantic appearance than what they had passed through heretofore. Summerfield had never been so far north, and even in his present situation he could not help admiring the enchanting scenery around him. He believed that he was far beyond the trapping grounds of the whites, and where no human except the savage had trod, and where but few of them even wandered. At first he had hoped that they would remain in the neighborhood where he believed Vic and Seth to be, but he was now well satisfied that there was no hope for him on that ground; that what efforts might be made for his escape, must be made solely by himself, and what success crowned them, must rest upon his own endeavors.

Just as the sun was setting, they reached the Indian village. It was composed of some thirty or forty rough wigwams or lodges, arranged so as to form a rough, irregular street. As soon as the savages came in sight of it, they uttered three long echoing yells, which in a moment were returned by a hundred lusty throats within the village. They then rode forward and entered it, and were surrounded by a multitude of women and children, jabbering and screaming like wild beasts. Summerfield they dragged mercilessly from his horse, and, although they could not help observing his condition, yet he was subjected to all manner of barbarities. The women jerked and pushed him, the children belabored him with sticks, and pulled his hair from his head by the roots. He was nearly stripped, and underwent all indignities possible. At first he was disposed to resist these liberties, but he

saw that it was utterly useless, and made no effort or attempt. His captors had left him with the women and children, and gone on to the extremity of the village and joined the rest of the warriors. Summerfield hoped that they would, after a while, take pity upon his condition and let him remain. But he was mistaken. The evidences which he gave of suffering only increased their fiendish delight, and they continued to torment him with greater determination. He sank to the earth, but was immediately overrun with children, who screamed with pleasure. He saw that he would be killed shortly should he remain thus, and sprang to his feet, hurling his tormentors madly from him. He felt the fever increasing in his veins, and already his vision was becoming strange and dizzy. It appeared as though he were dreaming, the ground seemed rising and turning, and he reeled like a drunken man. Several times a true sense of his situation and condition flashed across him, and then all was lost in one wild, wonderful illusion. He was raving mad!

The young savages paused a moment as they saw the unearthly light that gleamed in his eye, but in an instant they sprang upon him again. As quick as lightning he leaped forward, bearing a half-grown boy to the earth, clutched him by the feet, and swinging himself clean around, dashed his head against the earth, crushing the skull, and scattering the brains in every direction! Then, giving vent to a half shriek and yell, darted away with the swiftness of the panther.

This latter movement had been seen by several warriors, and they instantly rushed after him. Summerfield's unnatural strength lasted but a few moments, and he had gone but a short distance when he stumbled, fell, and was unable to rise. In a moment his pursuers were upon him, and had raised him to his feet.

Summerfield stared idiotically at them. Perhaps at that moment they understood his condition, and their stony hearts were touched with pity. They gazed at him a moment, and listened to his wild, incoherent raving, and seemed to understand that his senses were gone. They consulted a second or two before returning. One proposed to brain him on the spot; but the others determined to take him back, doctor him until he had fully recovered, and then carry out their favorite idea of putting him to the torture. Accordingly, laying firmly hold upon him, they led him slowly toward the village. The young savages came swarming toward him, and several sprang at him, determined to fully avenge the death of their companion. The men, however, kept them back, and restrained the demonstrations made by the infuriated squaws. These latter, too, when they were made acquainted with the captive's condition, seemed to feel a degree of pity, and checked their cries and threats. Summerfield was led to the extremity of the village, to an odd, strange-looking lodge, where dwelt the "medicine woman" of the tribe. Here he was left in charge of the old woman, and most of the rest, in obedience to her commands, left for their several homes.

The medicine woman watched and attended Summerfield with the kindness and assiduity of a mother. As she placed him upon the soft bed of skins, he had a lucid moment, and realized his condition; yet he judged it prudent to conceal the fact that he had regained his senses, and still affect delirium.

The lodge consisted of but a single room—large, square, and with one opening for ingress and egress. It was hung around with many different kinds of skins, and with many Indian garments. At one side, over a small, smouldering fire, was suspended a common kettle, with the contents of which she busied herself as Summerfield was thus taking his scrutinizing survey of the interior. He gazed with a strange fascination upon her repugnant features, but his mind finally became drowsy and wandering, and at last he dropped off into the realm of dreams.

He slept until midnight, when, his fever increasing, in a torment of thirst he awoke. The medicine woman detected the movement as he raised himself upon his elbow, and shuffled quickly up to him.

"Water! water!" demanded Summerfield.

She gently forced him back upon his bed, and in answer to his wish, poured from the kettle a steaming fluid which she placed to his lips. He swallowed the contents eagerly. It was bitter, and so hot that it fairly made him writhe with pain. It, however, was an an-

dyne, and in a moment so quieted his nerves that he sunk into a peaceful, dreamless slumber.

We need not record the story of his convalescence. His wound healed readily, and the potent herbs of the medicine woman drove the consuming fever from his system. In a few days he was able to sit and partake of nourishment, and in somewhat over a month he had entirely regained his health. As soon as he was able, he busied himself in doing small chores for his mistress—such as carrying water, building her fire, and the other jobs that he saw was needed. He often anticipated her desire, and sometimes took the vessel pleasantly from her hand and hastened away to accomplish her wish. This, of course, had its effect. She could not help being pleased (although she seemed to take particular pains to conceal it) at this exhibition of good will and obedience.

This woman, as has been stated, was the medicine woman of the tribe, which position she had held for some half dozen years. Previous to this, her husband had been the medicine man for a great number of years. The couple were never blessed with children, but were cheerfully supported and supplied with food by the warriors of the tribe. When any were wounded in battle, they were brought to this lodge, and remained until they either recovered or died, and those stricken down by sickness received the same treatment that Summerfield did. From long association with her husband, this woman came, in time, to possess as good a knowledge of medicine as did he, and upon his demise the tribe unanimously declared that she should fill his place. This was not unexpected upon her part, for she knew that none were as capable as herself. She was self-willed, and exercised considerable influence over the rest. None durst ever thwart her wishes. She beat the children when she chose, and railed at the warriors and squaws whenever the whim took possession of her, and really was their queen.

One day, some two months after Summerfield's capture, a couple of warriors came to the lodge of the medicine woman, and demanded him for the torture. The only answer she gave was a tremendous thwack over their heads with a heavy stick, and the assurance that he belonged to her, and she should keep him. This was so unexpected that they ventured to demur, which so enraged her that she nearly cracked the skull of one of them, and bade them never enter her lodge again. The savages, much crest-fallen, slunk away and imparted the discouraging fact to the others that they were cheated of their intended prey. There was considerable murmuring and remonstrance, but it was useless. The wish of the medicine woman was law, and none durst cross her path.

Summerfield had been a witness of this interview, and had learned enough of the Indian tongue to understand it. How it thrilled him to the very heart when he saw that the terrible torture had been averted! How he loved the old decrepit woman! He felt like kneeling at her feet and kissing her garments. But he checked his tumultuous feelings and endeavored to exhibit no traces of the wild pleasure that filled him. From the first, it was her intention to preserve his life and save him from the others. She was getting old, and felt the heavy hand of time upon her. She wished some one to fill the place of a son, and determined to adopt the paleface. She meant that he should be a son and a slave; she would have all claim upon him, and her right should not be interfered with by the others.

One day, late in the autumn, a war party, which had been absent nearly a week, returned with a prisoner, and Summerfield learned that he was to be burned at the stake that afternoon. This fact was communicated to him by the medicine woman, who further informed him that she should be present, and gave him also permission to attend. He had no desire, however, to witness the torture of a human being, and he felt that it would be safer to keep away from the savages at such a time. Accordingly he feigned sickness, and remained within the lodge during the afternoon. He could hear the wild, frenzied shouts and shrieks of the tormentors, and thanked God fervently that he had been saved such a fate. Toward night the tumult ceased and the medicine woman returned.

Summerfield awoke at an early hour, and, yielding to an impulse, arose and walked out

to the opposite extremity of the village, to the place where the wretch had been burned. Here he saw a sight that made him shudder. The savage had been bound to a small tree, and a huge pile of fagots placed around him. These had been fired and had burned nearly every particle of flesh from his body. Below the knees, the bones were white and glistening, without a particle of flesh, while in different parts of the body were clinging a few crisped cinders! The ashes still contained live coals, and the smell of burning flesh filled the air. As he stood gazing at it, several bones dropped to the earth, and, sick at heart, he turned and sought his lodge.

A short distance from the village, flowed a stream of considerable size, which was a tributary of the Yellowstone. Summerfield had determined that this should be the route of escape. Some night he would set himself afloat upon it, and conceal himself until his enemies had given over all hopes of capturing him, and then reach the trapping grounds of the whites, discover Vic, and return with him to the States. The following spring he fixed upon as the period to make the attempt.

But he was compelled to see the spring and summer months pass away without the slightest chance being given; and, to make matters worse, in the autumn the tribe gathered their effects together and moved farther to the westward. This migratory life is led by most of the savages of the far west, who change their abode at any moment the whim takes them. They will sometimes wander for a hundred miles before deciding upon a place to form a village; and perhaps after remaining a few months, again take up their goods and wander off again. Like the Arabs of the desert, they journey from place to place and call no spot their permanent home.

Another winter dragged wearily by, and Summerfield's chances seemed no better than before. Sometimes the thought would come over him that he should never escape, but live and die among these savages; and then he would resolve to make the trial at all hazards. He would have a chance, and the worst result could be but death, which would be no worse than his present mode of existence. But prudence whispered in his ear to wait, and the time would soon come.

And during all this time he had not forgotten Viola. Many a long and otherwise wearisome hour had been passed in thinking solely of her. He admitted that he loved her, and something seemed to tell him that his ardent passion was returned. He wondered what tribe held her, and whether she was yet living and unharmed. He sometimes thought and believed that she was not many miles distant, and the thought that he was securely fettered was maddening almost to desperation.

And then again Summerfield ceased his anxious hopes, and reflected of his gentle sister, far away in the States. Ere this she must have known that he was either dead or a prisoner among the savages. His fate seemed cruel indeed.

In the spring, hope was again awakened and turned in another direction. The tribe gathered their effects together and made a long journey to the southeast. In fact this was carried so far that they located themselves directly in the trapping ground of the whites. Summerfield believed that the time for action had now arrived, and determined that, in two weeks at the most, his fate should be decided.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLA'S CAPTIVITY.

As has been recorded, the savages, during their night attack upon the emigrant train, succeeded in breaking through the line of wagons, and reaching the one that held the females, scattering its terrified inmates. Viola, leaping to the ground, was immediately seized in the arms of a powerful savage and borne rapidly away. She screamed and struggled desperately, but it was useless, and in a few moments was carried beyond the reach of friends. She was placed upon a large, powerful horse, and the company rode rapidly forward until morning, when they halted. Viola was surprised to see that no other captives were with her, when she felt certain that several had been taken. She learned shortly, however, that the company had separated—the

other keeping them. Her own party numbered some thirty.

Her captors journeyed forward most of the day, and in the afternoon reached the Indian village, which was somewhat smaller than the one belonging to the Pawnee tribe. She found that she was among the Crows, a great and extensive tribe, now inhabiting Minnesota. As a general thing, for a number of years past, they have been friendly to the whites, although now and then a war party, flushed with the excitement of battle, has been known to attack bodies of emigrants; and it has often been found that they have retained prisoners for years. Their grounds are so far to the north that but few opportunities are afforded for recovering any prisoner that they may chance to hold.

There was much commotion among the Indians when it was known that a pale-faced captive was among them. The squaws gathered around, and there was more than one baleful glance of jealousy at the fair face of Viola. Her meek beauty and loveliness excited the admiration, and at that moment she was not conscious what a wild passion she had awakened in the heart of more than one savage. She was taken to the lodge of the chief, and given to understand that, for the future, she was to consider this her home.

Viola felt that she was beyond the reach of friends, and it was vain to look for succor. Hope was gone, but she despaired not. She determined to do her utmost to gain the goodwill of the chief, and beseech him to return her to her friends. She believed that she could eventually prevail upon him to do this.

The chief of this portion of the tribe—for it was but a portion—was a middle-aged man, much beloved by his subjects, and one who wielded an all-powerful influence. The royal lodge situated near the centre, was much superior to the others. It contained several rooms, and was furnished with all the luxuries that ever graced the savage life. The choicest apartment was given to Viola. She thanked the chief kindly, and accepted it with pleasure.

Viola busied herself in arranging the glittering beads, and making small trinkets for the two children of the chief. This pleased them greatly, and in time they evinced a genuine affection and love for her. They were both boys, one a dozen, and the other some ten years of age. Their father often sat and grimly smiled as they gathered around her with their childish pleadings and thanks, while the mother would sometimes pause and utter some kind word to her. Thus the winter passed and the spring came. Viola had fixed upon this season as the period to supplicate the chief to return her to the whites, when a strange circumstance occurred. There was considerable trouble among the neighboring tribes, and several bloody battles had been fought. In one case a party of Crows had attacked and nearly exterminated a small company of emigrants. In this attack they would have been most signally repulsed had they not been assisted and led by a white man! He seemed perfectly beside himself with fury, and urged on the savages as long as there was a chance to slaughter. Some half-a-dozen escaped only by flight, after being pursued a great distance. This white man had signified his intention to remain and live with the Indians, and had returned with them. When they were told of his great strength and prowess, they nearly worshipped him as a superior being, and his influence was nearly equal to that of the chief. The next day after his arrival, he married one of the squaws and erected himself a lodge. Viola had been told of his arrival, and her first impulse was to seek him; but when the chief communicated to her the circumstances, plain sense told her to shun such a dangerous and evil-minded man. She endeavored to avoid meeting him, and for two weeks succeeded. But matters could not remain always thus. Intelligence of her presence was communicated to the white man, and he determined at once to see her.

It was a pleasant day in spring that she was seated in the chieftain's lodge, playing with one of his children. Both the man and woman were gone, and she was alone with the boy, who was full of sport. Suddenly the door was darkened. She looked up and saw the veritable white man before her. He was standing in the door, gazing curiously, with a half grin at her. She started, and felt her heart shrink as she observed his vulgar gaze. She

nodded slightly, when, without heeding her, he remarked:

"Rather warm day, this," at the same time lifting his cap and brushing the matted hair from his forehead.

"Yes," returned Viola. "Won't you step in and take a seat?"

He stepped heavily in and seated himself upon a rude stool, near the door. Then he threw one leg over the other, whistled part of a song, then hummed it, and concluded by ejecting a mouthful of tobacco-juice in the face of the boy, and making a jump toward him. Frightened and screaming with pain the lad ran from the lodge as rapidly as his feet could carry him.

"Wagh! wagh! wagh!" laughed the white, leaning back and slapping his knee with his hand. "Rather scart, I guess. Wanted to get 'im out of the way, so I could talk with you, and 'cluded to take a 'riginal way to do it."

Viola was justly indignant at what she had witnessed, and felt like rising and leaving him also; but again something seemed to tell her to remain and be civil to him.

"So they've got you, hev they?" he queried.

"Yes; I have been a prisoner some time."

"Yeah, like it much?"

"I am treated very kindly, although, of course, I should prefer to be with my own kindred."

"Yeah. Wal, being we're both white, or leastways I pretend to be, we mought as well git acquainted. My name is Sam Redzel."

"Viola Vennond is mine."

"Yeah. Dummo as I ever heard it. From the States?"

"Yes; from Kentucky."

"Yeah. Wal, I'm from the States, too, and hev tramped around considerable; but I got among a lot of—rascals, and 'cluded as how redskins were as good as any, and so I've took up with 'em. You 'quainted with any trappers?"

"There was a man by the name of Summerfield, who joined—"

"What name is that?"

"Summerfield—George Summerfield. I believe, who was with us a day or two, although I did not see him after we were attacked."

Viola was about to say more, but paused as she saw the fearful contortion of Redzel's face. Some powerful emotion was stirring his very soul. Suddenly he spoke:

"Say, gal, do you see that 'ar mark?" As he said this, he turned his face toward her and pointed to the cicatrized wound that Seth had given.

"Yes," faltered Viola.

"Wal, that chap done it!"

"What! Summerfield?"

"He didn't himself; but he's the cause of it, and done what's as bad, and I've sworn that, ef that feller's livin', he's got to pay for it. Yas, sir-e-e!" and he clenched his fist spasmodically and fiercely struck his knee. He continued muttering a few moments, and then an embarrassing pause to Viola followed. At last, to change the subject, she asked:

"Did I understand you, Mr. Redzel, to say that you intended to spend your life with this tribe?"

"I don't know what you understood, but that's what I said, and what I intend to do, too. As long as whites live, why Sam Redzel ain't goin' to live with 'em."

"I suppose that you have great cause for provocation."

"That's so, gal."

"I would thank you not to address me thus," said she, provoked at his coarse familiarity.

"Whew! how then, my beauty?"

"Any way but that."

"Miss Vennond do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! no. Vily, Vily; that's it, that's it. Shoot my old hide, Vily, ef you ain't good lookin'. That's the fact." And he arose and patted her cheek.

"Mr. Redzel, I would thank you very much to treat me as the savages do," said she, with cutting indignation, arising and seating herself away from him.

"Wal, now, Vily, you ain't mad, are yer? It's just in fun."

"I don't care about such fun as that."

"Yeah. I wouldn't care either."

"And I would prefer to be alone."

"Wal, blast ye, be alone then!" exclaimed Redzel, enraged, as he arose and left.

At this juncture the chief entered, and Viola related all that had occurred. He was provoked, and assured her that it should not happen again. She seized the present opportunity to press her suit.

"Why not send me away, and thus be rid of the trouble I cause?"

The chief was perfectly taken aback at this. He gazed at her, as if doubting her senses. She repeated the question.

"Oh! Mascanagh cannot spare the white maiden."

"Why not? She does no good, and how did he do before they robbed her of her friends?"

"No, no; she is a part of his household. Mascanagh cannot spare her."

"O Mascanagh! the white maiden has wrought for you, and been pleased with your smile and disheartened with your frown. She has done all that she can to soften your heart, and will you not now restore her to her home? Oh! do not refuse me this!"

The chief seemed affected, and shook his head. Viola sank on her knees before him.

"O Mascanagh, refuse me not this!"

"Arise," said he, lifting her to her feet, "and I will talk with thee."

Viola's heart throbbed at this, and she raised her streaming eyes to his.

"The way is long," said he, "and who will guide thee?"

"Can you not?"

"I cannot leave my tribe."

"Surely there are many who would."

"Viola," said the chief, in a thrilling, earnest whisper, "had better remain with Mascanagh. Many warriors love her, and should she leave with any they would kill her. The white man loves her and would make her his squaw. She has no friend but Mascanagh."

This was a truth which had never crossed her mind before. She had never dreamed that she had awakened a passion in the breast of any savage, much less in the heart of Redzel; but now that her suspicions were aroused, she recollected many things which went to strengthen the remark of the chief. She remembered many strange glances that had been given her, and many strange actions upon the part of several warriors.

"Cannot Viola be returned?" she asked, mournfully.

"I will see," returned the chief. "Say no more about it, Mascanagh will do what he can for the white maiden. Let her wait."

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed she, fervently.

The chief arose and passed out, and shortly entered with his wife. The boy returned soon with inflamed eyes, and the mother, enraged, demanded that the white man should be punished. The chief said nothing, but his anger was great. Viola consoled the child, and succeeded in pacifying the parents. She urged them to let the insult pass for this occasion. She saw that, should a collision occur, it would be a terrible one between the chief and Redzel. At last they consented to overlook the insult, but Mascanagh affirmed that the white man's blood should pay for the repetition of a similar act.

Meanwhile Viola waited and hoped. She saw too plainly that half a score of savages watched her every movement, and Redzel dogged her steps whenever she left her lodge. She felt alarmed at the state of affairs, and earnestly hoped and prayed that she might be delivered from the fate that seemed impending.

CHAPTER IX.

ESCAPE AND THE PERILS OF A NIGHT.

SUMMERFIELD, by long and seemingly cheerful obedience to the medicine woman's veriest whims, succeeded in convincing her that he meditated no hope of escape, and was willing to reside with her tribe for life. Several times she had hinted that there might be opportunity offer, but he stated that, as he had no friends among the whites, he cared not to avail himself of it; and thus, as we have said, she came to believe, in time, that he was contented with his lot. Thus he gained considerable liberty for himself, and was often absent for a long time from the village without exciting any apprehensions upon her part.

One morning he arose, and taking one of the

medicine woman's rifles, told her that he believed he should spend the day in hunting. She made no objection, but admonished him to be on hand before evening. He promised obedience, and, throwing the gun over his shoulder, stepped lightly forth. The hour was so early that, as he gazed about him, he saw that the village was not yet astir.

But he was seen. There happened, by merest chance, to be a warrior who observed him leaving the village. This savage was his greatest enemy, and had abused him upon more than one occasion. Seizing his rifle, he stealthily and silently followed Summerfield, who dreamed of no pursuer.

When he left the village, he had no thought of attempting an escape, but intended to gain still more of the old woman's confidence by his punctual obedience. He had wandered but a mile or so, when the thought suddenly flashed upon him that the proper moment had arrived to make the attempt! The wild hope thus suddenly awakened completely overcame him. With a heart throbbing painfully, he seated himself upon the earth and gave way to his emotion. In a few moments he mastered it, and began calmly reflecting upon the chances that favored him. He possessed a trusty rifle, and was well supplied with ammunition. This was his only weapon, yet it was sufficient to answer all purposes. And when would another more favorable opportunity be given him? What was to hinder him now? Could there be a better combination of circumstances in his favor? He would make the attempt. He would have a day and night before there would be danger of pursuit, and in that time he could place a long distance between himself and his enemies. Yes, he would make the trial at all hazards.

He had just formed this determination and arisen to his feet, when he heard a step beside him, and looking up, saw the form of an Indian, whom he recognized as his deadliest enemy. He affected no surprise, but gazed at him as though his appearance at this particular moment was a matter of course. He could not avoid, however, noticing the devilish grin that was on his face.

"Eh! very brave, gone to run away! eh!" said the savage, halting and gazing into his face.

Now that Summerfield had formed the determination, he had also determined that nothing should stand in the way of the attempt. Besides, he remembered the indignities that he had received at the hands of this savage, and he made up his mind that they were finished. He should suffer no more.

"Who said I was going to run away?" he demanded.

"Eh, you run away!"

"Who said so, I say?"

"Me say so! me say so!"

"Then suppose I tell you, you lie!"

"What's that? what's that?" demanded the savage, not fully comprehending him.

"Nothing, only you're a terrible liar."

"Me scalp you! me scalp you!" shouted the Indian, his eyes glistening like a basilisk's.

"I don't know about that, my copper-colored friend; it takes two to make such a bargain."

"Give me gun!" said he, reaching for Summerfield's rifle.

"No, I thank you. I ain't such a fool as that."

The savage was growing furious. He saw that his demands were refused, and he received in turn insult for insult.

"You run away?" he asked.

"Well, yes, old copperhead, that's my intention. Any objections? I find I am losing time in palavering with you, and if you have got anything to say, why out with it most mighty quick." Summerfield leaned very graciously on his gun, and grinned in the savage's face.

"Give me gun!" he again demanded.

"Well, take it, then," said Summerfield, reaching it toward him.

The savage stepped forward, but as his hand touched it it was withdrawn, and Summerfield, to console him in his disappointment, placed his thumb on his nose, shut one eye, and twirled his fingers in a tantalizing manner. This was too much for the infuriated savage. With a whoop of rage, he jerked out his knife and sprang upon him. But Summerfield knew that this movement would follow, and was prepared for it. Seizing his rifle by the barrel, he swung it quickly around his head,

bringing the stock down with a stunning crash upon the skull of the savage. This done, he again rested it upon the earth, folded his arms over the muzzle, and gazed complacently at his fallen enemy.

"Come, old chap, how long are you going to lie there?" he asked at last.

The only answer was several painful twitches of the limbs.

"I'll give you a minute, and if you don't come to time, why you're whipped. Do you understand?"

Several struggles as before were the only answer.

"Well, old fellow, you're whipped, and whipped about as nicely as you ever were in your life, I reckon," said Summerfield.

The savage still remained unconscious, for he had given him a wound that would keep him insensible for a long time.

"Being it's you, suppose I relieve you of the extra weight of these trinkets." So saying, Summerfield took a couple of knives from his waist, rifle, and all his ammunition, thus leaving him entirely unarmed, and supplying himself as well as he could wish.

"There! when you come to, just give my compliments to the folks at home, and reserve my good wishes for yourself. Good-by."

He sprang away, for he realized fully that his time was incalculably precious. The Indian would shortly recover, return, and the pursuit would be commenced. Capture would be certain death. The medicine woman's interference would avail nothing, and should she be convinced that her prisoner was endeavoring to leave her, she would not resist the demands of the tribe.

He started off like a frightened animal. The ground seemed to fly from under him, and he hardly paused for breath until the sun was high in the heavens. Then he found himself upon the banks of a swift flowing stream. It was some twenty yards wide, and appeared very deep. The water was exceedingly clear and limpid, and the white pebbles could be seen glistening upon the bottom for a long distance. He hesitated about entering it, for it was icy cold, and it seemed nearly impossible to stem the strong current. At length, however, he ventured, and resolutely plunged in. It sent the shiver through his frame, but he breasted it manfully and succeeded in soon reaching the opposite bank. He judged it was now past noon, and concluded to rest awhile and dry his garments. His ammunition was still dry and ready to use; but he was startled to find that he had lost one of his rifles. Though bound to his back upon entering the water, one had slipped out and fallen to the bottom without his knowledge.

Hardly a half hour was spent in rest, when he hastened on again. He travelled by the sun, keeping in a southerly direction, and carefully guarding against the tendency that persons in his situation are subjected to; that is, of journeying in a circle. Several times he found that he had unconsciously changed his direction; the utmost watchfulness was necessary to guard against a mistake that might be fatal. He judged that he could not be far from the Black Hills, and that he must be very near, if not directly upon the trapping grounds of the whites. This fact nerved him with hope, and gave him confidence in the chances before him.

As the sun had nearly reached the horizon, he came upon the banks of another stream of considerable size. This, he saw, ran from the direction he wished to follow. Instead of crossing, he determined to keep along its banks. There would thus be no danger of travelling in a wrong direction, and a certainty of going south. The stream had its rise in the southern part of the Black Hills, and, after flowing northward, united with the Sweetwater, and eventually joined the turbid waters of the great Missouri. The journeying here was comparatively easy also.

Ere night came upon him nature began to show itself. He was not only fatigued but intensely hungry, and felt that he must have food of some kind before he slept. Strangely enough, he had not come across any game, and it seemed that the country contained none. But fortune favored him, for, all at once, he stumbled upon a large bed of *commotes*. This is a species of fruit found in the river bottoms of this section. It so closely resembles the common radish, both in form and taste, that it is often mistaken for it, and some have gone so far as to assert that it is really the same fruit

growing wild. It is more healthy and nutritious, and is probably a different vegetable.

Having fully satisfied the cravings of hunger, and as darkness had already commenced, he judged it prudent to look for a resting-place. Bordering the stream were a number of large cottonwoods, and selecting one of these, he ascended it. The branches were large and full, and passing out upon one, he secured himself in such a position that he deemed no movement of his own could dislodge him. His rifle rested upon the limb above him, and his position was as really comfortable as it was possible to make it.

Resting thus pleasantly, it was not long before the drowsiness of sleep came over him. Although he heard the clear, ringing yell of a panther in the distance, he did not let it disturb his repose, but resolutely closed his eyes, and was soon in the realm of sleep.

Toward midnight he had a startling dream. It seemed that he was running, without arms of any kind, and was pursued by a gigantic savage, who gained rapidly upon him at every step. He strove, in an agony of terror to escape, but at last in despair, sank to the earth. As the savage sprang upon him, he endeavored to scream, and—awoke, and found that he was falling. He clutched desperately at the limbs, but it availed nothing, and gliding swiftly through the branches he struck the earth. The distance was short, and he was not hurt in the least by the fall. He found, however, that he was in a cold sweat of fear, and quickly ascended the tree again. The moon had risen, and he could distinctly discern objects at a considerable distance.

He was provoked at this mishap, yet it was the most providential circumstance that could have befallen him. Like many other misfortunes, it was a disguised blessing. He had been in the tree but a few moments when he was startled by hearing a twig break, and gazing downward, he saw, stealthily moving forward upon his trail, the being of his dream! A swarthy, powerful savage was coming directly toward the tree! His head was bent, and Summerfield well knew that he was seeking his life.

There was no time for hesitation. The savage was upon Summerfield's trail, and the bright moon enabled him to follow it rapidly and surely. He did not deem he was so near the object of his search, but still was using customary caution. The breaking of the twig was a strange accident. The whole truth flashed across Summerfield at once, and reaching up and taking his rifle, he took a quick but sure aim at the savage and fired! There was that cry of agony, the leap in the air, and he lay a quivering corpse beneath the tree.

"God grant that there are no more!" exclaimed the fugitive, hastily reloading.

He waited in fearful expectation a long time, but as none others appeared, he concluded that this must be the only one upon his track. After an hour or so, he descended to examine the body. He was gratified to find that it did not belong to the tribe he had left. It was probably some solitary hunter who had accidentally come upon his trail, and with characteristic cunning judged it to be a white man's, and had followed it for the purpose of slaying him. Summerfield found that the bullet had entered at the top of the head and passed out through the back; of course he was stone dead, and stark and stiff. Summerfield forced the fingers apart, and took the rifle, his powder horn, his bullet pouch, and his scalping knife. This done, he ascended the tree, determined to either bury the body in the morning, or carefully cover it with twigs and leaves.

Both rifles were loaded, and carefully extending them upon two branches overhead, he arranged his position so that he might sleep without danger of falling, and patiently waited for the gentle goddess to come. He had lain a half hour thus, and had reached that state when one is neither asleep nor awake, when he was startled by that long, indescribable howl of the wolf! It was a long way off, but in a moment more there was another chorus, nearer, and still increased by a great number. In a short time came an answering howl from nearly the opposite quarter, then another from a different point, and in twenty minutes it seemed that the whole country was alive and swarming with them! He supposed that a number had scented his trail and that of the savage, and had given these signals to the others in the neighborhood. At any rate he knew that they were all centring toward the tree,

and would be there in an unpleasantly short time.

They were not the common prairie wolf, but the real mountain wolf—an animal as much fiercer and more courageous than the former as is the bear to the common dog. At this season of the year they were nearly famished, and would hesitate to attack nothing. They generally united in great numbers, and no single body could withstand their determined onslaughts. Incredible as it may seem, instances have occurred in which the grizzly bear has been overcome by their persistent and prolonged attacks.

In a few moments he saw the lank form of a large, gaunt wolf, and in an incredibly short space of time the ground beneath the tree was alive with them. They came from every direction, and their numbers seemed exhaustless. The foremost scenting the body of the savage, sprang upon it and tore it in shreds in an instant. Soon there was nothing left but the glistening bones, and they still snarled and fought over these, scattering them in every direction.

Then they turned their horrid, bloody jaws up to Summerfield, as if to ask him to descend.

"Yes, I suppose you would like to taste my precious carcass," said he. "No doubt Indian meat has whetted your appetite somewhat, but I think rather too much of myself to mingle in your society. You must really excuse me."

The wolves were leaping and plunging upward, fairly crazed by the taste of blood. The moon was so bright that Summerfield could discern their movements plainly. He saw one large fellow become wounded by the claw of another in the struggle. A small quantity of blood issued from the wound, and in a twinkling he was pounced upon by a score of others, who tore him limb from limb!

"What a pity you wouldn't all do that!" said Summerfield as he witnessed it.

As he had two rifles and plenty of ammunition, he determined to do it for them. He fired at random. A sharp yell told the result, and the snapping of jaws and growlings of hate betokened his fate. Summerfield waited a moment, until he judged that this had been devoured, and then discharged the second rifle among them. All were instantly engaged in the repast over the fallen one. Again he fired, and again the same result. Their appetites seemed insatiate. Summerfield really wondered whether the last wolf would not still demand food after he had helped to eat all the rest! Such a thing seemed probable indeed.

He had just loaded his own rifle and placed it above him for use, when it slipped and fell to the ground. The greedy animals immediately sprang upon it and clawed it as though it were another victim. Summerfield immediately fired to withdraw their attention, lest they should injure it. This practice he kept up for nearly an hour, until he judged that he must have slain over twenty. His powder was now getting low, and he deemed it best to preserve it for future use. Accordingly, reloading it, he placed his gun above him and engaged himself in gazing down upon the strange sight below. Their actions afforded him amusement for a time, but soon they began to alarm him. Some were leaping upward so furiously that they caught at the lowermost limbs, and there really was danger of their remaining upon them. All at once, Summerfield saw that one had actually reached and was upon the limb! As quick as lightning he caught his rifle and sent the bullet crashing through his head. The brute rolled to the ground, where, of course, he met the fate of his companions.

Our hero judged it best to fire at intervals, when there was a probability of the wolves becoming too clamorous and furious. Every now and then he could see numbers approach and join the main body, until nothing could be seen but their dark, struggling bodies. As the moon, at intervals, was veiled by some passing cloud, their forms darkened, and resembled some hideous denizens of the lower regions. And then again, as their tawny hides, flashing eyes, and glistening teeth, came to view, their appearance was, if possible, more horrid and terrific than before. Summerfield felt that his was certainly a strange situation. He knew not where a single human being except himself was. He was alone in the Far West, driven to a tree by a horde of famished

wolves, and in the middle of the night was compelled to keep watch to save himself from one of the most horrible deaths that could befall him.

Despite his fearful position and the terrific noises around him, he began to give way to a heavy drowsiness! He started with terror when he found it gaining upon him, and strove to the utmost to shake it off; but, strange as it may seem, he failed. He kept moving from limb to limb, until it seemed that his strength was entirely gone, and then, with a sad want of foresight, concluded to seat himself comfortably and watch the yelping wolves beneath him! What might be expected followed—the result that had nearly been fatal. In ten minutes he was sound asleep!

Slowly, gradually, and surely, he commenced sinking! The motion increased, and still he slept! A limb brushed his face and he awoke! He felt himself slipping, sliding, sinking, sinking, sinking, so horribly! He screamed and clutched like a madman at the frail twigs, but they glided like fiery serpents through his blistered hands! The wolves grew more furious and crazy! He yelled, and clinched and struck out like a drowning man! Still he sunk lower, lower, lower, and it seemed he would never reach the ground! Oh, the concentrated horror of those interminable seconds! The agony of a lifetime may be compressed into a single moment! Summerfield felt like a writhing body of fire.

But soon he passed below the limbs! There was an indescribable dizzy gliding through air, and he struck directly upon the back of a wolf! At the same instant, he gave a yell—so awful, so agonized, that it sounded far above the combined howls of the animals! His sudden fall and terrific scream startled, for one moment, those directly around him, and they darted a few yards away. It was his moment of respite from a horrible death, and with a full realization of his appalling situation he sprang upward with the energy of despair. His hands grasped the low sweeping limbs above him. The wolves returned to their prize quickly, but their very eagerness thwarted their purpose, for, leaping from different directions at the same moment they came in collision and dropped to the ground in a contorted, shrieking mass. How precious was that moment! The power of Summerfield's muscular arms was exerted to its utmost, and he had succeeded in gaining his position on a lower limb, when one of the brutes by a desperate leap fastened his fangs upon the man's foot. The creature did not let go its hold. Maddened at this incredible tenacity, Summerfield shook his limb desperately, and the wolf fell—his poisoned claws cutting to the bone of the ankle, and stripping the moccasin from his lacerated foot!

Cowering and quivering like an aspen, he ascended to the topmost limb, and clung till the morning. He drew a deep breath, and saw that the wolves were departing; one by one they took themselves away, until none were left. He waited a long time, and then tremblingly descended. As he stepped to the earth, the pain of his mangled foot caused him to drop as if shot. The nails of the wolf, from their having clawed the putrid carcasses of animals, had a peculiar poison upon them. This caused his foot and ankle to swell enormously. After a few moments, however, he was able to stand upon it, and limped around and picked up his rifles. His own was twenty yards from the tree! They were both considerably scratched and disfigured, but not really injured. Taking these up, and his tattered moccasin, bedabbled with blood, he hobbled to the brook, where he sat and bathed his wound in the cooling fluid. There was a painful smart at first, but he soon found it relieved it, and continued his bathing until the swelling had considerably diminished. Then he ceased, and thought upon the best course left for him to pursue.

But one course remained, and that was to pursue his journey as rapidly as possible into the Black Hills, in whose fastnesses he could find safety and, perchance, might meet with some adventurous trapper. Should he be disappointed in this, however, he could pursue his way cautiously to the east, leaving it to Providence to direct his steps. With as much speed as his swollen limb would permit, he started on his way, first crossing the stream. Tarrying on its opposite bank for a supply of commotes, he was startled at hearing voices. He crept close into the heavy mass of rank

grass lining the bank of the stream, and then peered cautiously out. Within a dozen yards of him he saw three Indians following his trail. He saw them leave the stream and go toward the tree, where he heard them a long time in conversation. Then they returned to the stream and held another earnest consultation, when they started rapidly on the back track! They had thus given up all hope of recapturing him, and he was safe from farther pursuit.

The explanation of their movement was this. They had followed the trail of the fugitive with much difficulty, yet with unerring certainty, to the point where it was lost in the numerous tracks of the wolves. Here they saw had been some fatal occurrence very recently. They observed the bones of the wolves scattered around, and, at the base of the tree, discovered the skull and some of the bones of the savage. This they supposed to be the remains of Summerfield, and, of course, nothing was left for them to do but to return with that intelligence. Thus deeply are the most direct providences often veiled. Summerfield understood the meaning of the proceedings of the savages, and in the gratitude of his heart he knelt upon the earth and offered up his fervent thanks to the preserving Power that was thus watching over him. With the knowledge that there was no pursuit came a sense of conscious security, and he regarded his ultimate escape as certain at that moment as though he were in his native state.

For two days he pressed on slowly. His limb still pained him, but did not delay his escape. During the afternoon of the second day, when he had penetrated far into the depths of the hills, he came suddenly upon the body of a savage, but recently killed. There was the bloody track of the bullet through the breast, the scalp had been ripped off, and the body stripped of nearly every shred of dress. It lay flat on the back, each limb extended wide, and the insects of corruption were already at their work. He did not like this. It proved that Indians were around, and compelled him to exercise his utmost care. A cañon of the mountain now opened before him, through which flowed a stream of considerable size. Upon the banks of this he detected infallible signs of beavers. There were numerous tracks on the shore, and he was confident that a dam was not far off. Examining this bank closely, he came upon a place dug in it, and feeling carefully a few inches under the water, his hand touched the trap! There were whites, then, not far off. Thank Heaven! He could hardly constrain his feelings from giving vent in a shout.

He proceeded up stream to find them. As he walked on, he thought he heard a whistle. Following the direction indicated, he could soon distinguish a tune—yes, it was that melody of the West, the "Arkansas Traveller!" Still cautiously moving on, he came upon the whistler. A tall, lank man, with his side toward him, with a hat resembling a beehive, and his arms folded over the muzzle of his rifle, was contentedly whistling this melody. Summerfield gazed a moment in speechless astonishment. Those frightfully bent legs could belong to but one person. Seth Potter was standing before him!

CHAPTER X.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS.

For a time, Summerfield was at a loss how to proceed. Joy at this fortunate turn of affairs completely upset his ideas for a moment. At last he strode hastily forward and laid his hand upon the arm of Seth.

"How are you, old friend?" said he, familiarly, his face aglow with pleasure. The individual addressed, without changing his posture, stopped whistling a second with the remark:

"Wait a minute. I just got to the turn of this tune," and proceeded deliberately to finish the "turn" of it; then "turned" himself, looked a moment in the face of the person before him; stopped whistling; dropped his gun; stepped back a pace or two, then jumped forward.

"By thunder, it's him! It's him! It's him!"

And catching Summerfield's hand, he shook and pulled and squeezed and twisted it, until the poor fellow writhed with pain.

"For Heaven's sake, Seth, don't kill me! You have hold of my hand."

"Yas, sir; it's him! It's him! Whoop! I'd like to know where, in the name of all that's curus, you've come from? Why, sir, if I hadn't just squeezed your hand, I'd believe I seen a ghost."

Summerfield smiled, and at last broke into a loud laugh.

"I'll be darned if it ain't enough to set a fellow crazy. Why, man alive, Vic and me have been one winter trapping here, gone back to Independence, come back here agin, and just as we're going to tramp agin, you come along. If that ain't funny, why, that's all."

"Where's Vic and Jim?" asked Summerfield.

"Where's Jim? He got killed at the same time you did. You mind that great chase when we lost you. Wal, the Engins got so close they hit Jim's horse and tumbled him over. Howsumever, that didn't make no difference. Jim kept on, jogging along as fast as before. I told him to jump on my animal, 'cause you know there ain't no hosses that I can't out-run. Jim wouldn't do it, and bimeby he got a piece of lead that throwed him in his tracks. That was the last of poor Jim. Jim was a good chap."

"Where's Vic? He's alive, you say!"

"Yas, yas; he's up in the 'Hole.' He'll be down pretty soon. We'd better wait till he comes. Let's set down on this stone."

"Ain't there savages in this neighborhood?" asked Summerfield, as they seated themselves.

"Yas, a few; but they don't know we're about. We manage to keep the traps close. Vic had a tussle with one down yonder yesterday. He'd found out we're about here, and we seen his tracks where he'd been for two or three days nosin' around. He's after our hair, but lost his own."

"I believe I came upon him a short time since."

"Yas; well, let's hear about your capers the last year or two; I want to know where you come from, though them Engin fixens you got on shows pretty near."

Summerfield thereupon proceeded to give a short, rapid sketch of his experience from the time of his falling into the hands of the Indians up to the present moment. He was often interrupted by Seth, who was much excited with his narration. When he had finished, Seth asked:

"Do you remember Redzel, George—that feller I had such a fight with?"

"I don't think there is much danger of my ever forgetting him."

"Well, sir, he's up among the Crow Indians. Vic seen him, last winter, with a lot. He's jined them—gone with 'em, and I calculate as how that's one reason why there's been so many murders 'mong the emigrants this season."

"The fiend! Do you think he has had a hand in it?"

"He's had more than a hand in it—he has had both hands."

"Well, his disposition is evil enough."

"Heigh! there comes Vic. Wait a moment, and just keep shady."

Summerfield saw the well-remembered form of the hunter approaching, and shrinking behind Seth, veiled his face as much as possible. In a moment Seth said, in a loud tone:

"Come here, Vic; here's a redskin I caught at our traps. I've been trying to get his top-knot off, but can't manage him. Quick, I want your help!"

"Just jump out the way and let me put a piece o' lead through his head. 'Twont take me long to settle the job for him."

Seth sprang away, and the movement had nigh been fatal. Vic was in the very act of raising his rifle to his shoulder, when Summerfield threw up his hands with a clear ringing laugh. To have seen the trapper's appearance then! His expression of comical wonder cannot be described. He stood a second, then dropped his rifle, took the cap from his head, shaded his eyes, and stooping slightly, peered forward in mute astonishment. At this point, Seth commenced jumping and dancing, flung his hat upon the ground, and went to stamping it, exclaiming at intervals:

"That's the first time I ever got Vic. He'll have to give in now!"

Vic's eyes seemed to grow lighter and larger each moment. He still stood in his prone position, seemingly bereft of all reason. Seth

continued going up and down, his legs flying in every direction, until his foot came suddenly in contact with a stone, throwing him heels over head. The state of affairs was becoming embarrassing to Summerfield, and, stepping forward, he said:

"Vic, don't you remember me?"

"I guess so. Is't you, Somefield?" he gasped.

"Why, certainly. How are you?"

And the two grasped and shook hands as only friends can. Seth approached, spread his feet far apart, placed his hands in the pockets which he had rigged in his dress, threw his hat on the back of his head, and looked on.

"You appeared to not know me," said Summerfield, pleasantly.

"Of course I knowed yer, but, bears and bufers, who thort *you's* him? I's sartin it's a spirit I's lookin' at. Wagh! wagh! wagh!"

And the trapper threw his head back and laughed—laughed till the big drops tumbled down his cheeks.

"Vic, you're a fool," remarked Seth gravely.

He paid no attention to this, but ceased laughing, stooped, picked up his gun, and said:

"Somefield, this yer's the greatest time this beaver ever seed."

"So I see," returned Summerfield. "But it seems to me that we have enjoyed this surpriss long. Suppose we hunt up your lodgings and return."

As they proceeded, he continued:

"Vic, is Wandaught dead?"

"There it is! Don't you believe me!" demanded Seth.

"Well, no; I have some doubts about your respect for truth," replied he, with a smile.

Seth gave vent to a "Humph!" strode on, and Summerfield looked to Vic for the answer.

"Yas," said he. "Jim went under a long time ago, and died hard. Did Crooked Pegs tell you?"

"He said that he was killed in that chase, where I left you."

"How?"

"First, his horse was shot, and then he was."

"Yes; Crooked Pegs told the truth for once. I guess he'll be sick for it."

"Here, no personalities except on business," said Seth, turning his head half around.

"Wagh! wagh! Just look at them pegs o' his. Did you know, Somefield, that he allers ties 'em round his neck when he goes to sleep! Took me and Jim—took me a half day to ontie 'em once."

"Shut up! Thunderation!" exclaimed Seth.

Summerfield had taken little interest in this badinage and raillery, but had been reflecting upon the death of Wandaught.

"Vic," said he, "tell me the particulars of Jim's death."

"Thar ain't much particlers," said he, throwing aside his frivolity. "His hoss got hit a little while after you left, and then next thing he got hit, and saying good-bye, keeled over. He wanted me to lift his h'ar to save it from the devils, but they're comin' so all-firedly, I hadn't time. I hated to refuse Jim, 'cause Jim war a good feller, but I had to. He tumbled around hard until they come up, when thar's some tall howlin' and screamin' over him. We had to work to git ourselves off, and kept up the run till night."

"Despite himself, a tear crept to Summerfield's eye at this rude narration of the death of one who had been his friend. In his short acquaintance, he had formed a strong friendship for Wandaught, who possessed better qualities of head and heart than are generally found among those of his class.

"It was a great loss to you," remarked he, thoughtfully.

"Yas; great loss," returned Vic.

There was something in the tone in which this was uttered that startled Summerfield. Had he seen the expression upon the speaker's face, perhaps he would have been startled still more. But he did not, and continued:

"I regret his death more than it seemed I ever could. But, of course, there is no use of regretting it. He has been dead a long time, and I suppose both of you have come to regard it with feelings that time has softened.

"Yas," replied both, in that puzzling tone again. Summerfield looked up, but, as they were before him, he could not see the expression upon their countenances. But at that instant looking beyond them, he observed a hunter at some distance, who was approaching.

"Who is that?" he asked, as the man drew near.

"A feller what jined us a few days ago, returned Vic.

"Isn't that Wandaught?" he asked, excitedly.

"Spose he's come to life, too!" said Seth, with a laugh.

Summerfield watched the stranger as they neared each other, and was soon convinced that he had not been mistaken. It was Wandaught. He said nothing, however, until they were together, when he stepped out with:

"How are you, Jim?"

The hunter hesitated a moment, but did not evince as much surprise as either Seth or Vic. He looked until he was sure of the person, and then returned the salutation. Summerfield extended his hand, but it was not taken.

"Why, what does that mean?" he asked.

"Didn't you know I never shook paws in my life? I can't do it. But, ole beaver, I can tell you that Jim Wandaught is blasted glad to see you."

At this point the questions commenced. Summerfield gave a short history of his principal experiences since they had parted, and learned from Wandaught that neither he nor his horse had been wounded in the chase mentioned. Vic, all this time, stood gazing very complacently upon them, giving vent now and then to a loud guffaw, and finally bursting into a full laugh. Seth had commenced whistling the "Arkansas Traveller," but found great difficulty in keeping his mouth in shape. Finally he gave up and joined Vic. They enjoyed the joke hugely.

Nearly half an hour was passed in laughing, explaining, and railing pleasantly at each other. At last affairs were adjusted, and they came to a sort of understanding. It was then determined to return to the "Hole," or their lodging place. This was certainly a strange place.

After walking some two or three hundred yards, they reached a spot where the pebbles extended quite a distance from the stream, as though it had once been the bed of some great basin.

"Now tread soft, and don't stir the gravel," said Vic, leading the way. Wandaught followed next, walking as carefully, and then came Seth, who, after touching his feet, seemed to think it necessary to make a downward bend of his knee at each step, throwing up each arm at the same time. Going a few rods, an abrupt turn was made, when Vic halted before a large flat stone. Both he and Wandaught gazed cautiously around them a moment, when the former stooped and lifted the stone, and disappeared beneath it. Wandaught and Seth did the same, and Summerfield supposed that it was intended for him to follow suit; so, without hesitation, he raised it and sprang down some six or eight feet. The stone closed after him, and he found himself in inky blackness.

"Where under the sun are we?" he asked, groping about.

"Down here," was the enlightened reply.

"I should think—confound it!" he exclaimed as he pitched over somebody at his feet. He arose, and was about to speak, when his nose came violently in collision with one of his companions.

"Come, don't but me that way," laughed Wandaught.

"How do you expect I am going to get around here? I'll knock my brains out pretty soon," said Summerfield, feeling blindly around with his hands. Judging it best to not move until he understood his precise situation, he seated himself upon the earth and quietly waited for one of them to produce a light. In a few minutes, Wandaught succeeded in getting some smoky substance lighted, which threw its oily rays upon the faces of the hunters. Summerfield gazed about, and saw a dingy and singular looking place. It was an apartment some eight or nine feet wide, and about a dozen feet in length, with an average height of eight or nine feet. Connected with this was another of about half its size. The whole was so regularly constructed as to show that, although Nature might have assisted, she never had made it.

"Well, if this doesn't beat all," said Summerfield, in unfeigned astonishment. "Did you dig this out yourself, Vic?"

"No, sir. This war here 'fore you or I seed daylight," and, being in a communicative mood, he seated himself upon a bundle of furs, and said:

"About ten years ago, up at Fort Hall, a feller, called Stumpy Bill, got into a muss with a Seminole what blowed thunder through his carcass, and then left. There didn't nobody appear to care nothin' about it, and so I nussed him; but, I see he'd have to go under. The redskin's lead had gone clean through him. Bill knowed he'd have to go, and the night afore, he called me to him and told me about this place. He said a feller had told him of it, what happened to find it by chance once. He said the redskins didn't know nothin' 'bout it, and as there war plenty beaver here, it was a mighty nice place. I'd been in this neighborhood once or twice, and hadn't much trouble to find it. As he called it the 'Hole,' I 'cluded to do the same. That ar war why I went alone fur the last nine or ten year. Two or three times I thought o' takin' some feller, but put it off, till these fellers joined me, when I brought 'em to it. I hain't changed it any, but left it the same as I found it."

"Is there not danger of your retreat being discovered?"

"Nary danger. I got chased by a lot of the devils once, and ducked inter here orful quick, and, skin me, ef a couple of the all-fired fools didn't squat themselves right square on the stone up thar and go to jabberin'."

"You see," said Seth, who had seated himself upon a quantity of furs, "they don't think of looking in the ground for a house, and—"

"Just shut up that meat trap," said Vic.

"Rather a narrow escape," suggested Summerfield.

"Not so narrow as I had once, for a red devil did git in here once while I's tendin' to my traps. I come back, and wa'nt thinkin' o' nothin', when, just as I lifted the stone, bang went somethin' through my cap—see, thar's the hole. Wal, you'd better believe I dropped that stone as quick as if 'twere hot. Thinks I, who's down thar? Some feller's gone inter the wrong bed, and it's time he's gotten out. Coz why? This feller wants to git in! I know'd as how thar wa'nt but one, for if thar war, I'd got all their lead. So I just slips up to the stone thar, and goes to groanin' orful, makin' b'lieve I's hit. Then I floundered 'bout like a sick grizzly, and then fatched a mighty long grunt, and scratched and kicked the stones; then gets up soft, without makin' no noise, cocks Polly, steps back and lays low, waiten for sarcumstances to dewelop themselves. Putty soon I seed the stone move a little; then it war still for an hour or so; then his noddle jumped out and ducked in 'fore I could draw trigger. In a little while I seed the stone move agin, and his noddle come out mighty slow, lookin' just like a tappin' snorkle. He didn't see me, and kept slidin' out. Just then I blazes away, and the gravel-stones flew. I ran up and found him gone under, the stone war on his back, an' his legs hangin' down in the Hole. I lifted his h'ar, and pitched him into the creek. That's it hangin' up thar."

Summerfield arose, and, with curiosity, untwisted some long black hair from the tooth of a beaver, that was driven into the flinty earth. It was covered with dust, the hair was stiff and wiry, and as he took it down the dried skin attached to it rattled like coarse paper.

As it was now late in the afternoon, Vic remarked that he would pass out and see to the traps. Accordingly he ascended and disappeared, and Summerfield proceeded to examine more closely the curious apartment in which he found himself. He turned to speak to Wandaught, but saw that he was stretched out and sound asleep, while Seth was in the other apartment with another light.

The examination showed him but little that he had not already observed. The walls were hard and gravelly, and there was little danger of their crumbling or falling in. In one corner was a large pile of beaver skins, while several others were extended upon the ground, forming rude but warm and comfortable mattresses.

Summerfield passed into the other apartment where Seth was preparing the evening meal.

"Do you cook here?" he asked, gazing at some ashes in one corner.

"Certainly—where would we?"

"Where does the smoke go?"

"There's a hole up there, under a stone, that lets it all out."

"But ain't there danger of the smoke being seen?"

"We never have a fire except on dark nights."

"Well, I must say this is the most fabulous place I ever stumbled upon."

"'Tis funny. Made me open my eyes at first."

In a short time Vic returned, when Wandaught was awakened, and they sat down to their meal. Not one forgot what had been the custom of Summerfield on such occasions, and with respectful solemnity, the three bowed their heads while he invoked God's blessing upon the humble food before them. It was certainly a pleasing sight to see these bronzed and hardened trappers thus showing their regard for the sacred truths of which they knew so little.

The meal consisted simply of the tail of the beaver. This really, when properly cooked, is a delicious article of food, and much superior to many dishes in vogue in civilized society. At times it is the principal food of the trapper.

The meal was enlivened by jokes and remarks, and after its close a long time was spent in conversation and story-telling. Summerfield again gave his own adventures, not omitting any particulars except that which referred to Viola. Vic related several thrilling episodes of his life, with which neither Wandaught nor Seth was familiar; and Wandaught, in turn, recounted some exciting adventures which we will not transcribe at this point. At a late hour they all lay down, and all were soon wrapped in repose.

CHAPTER XI.

IN TROUBLE AND OUT OF IT.

THE morning after Summerfield's arrival, one of the cold spells so common in that region commenced. There was a constant fall of rain, and it required their utmost endeavors to prevent it entering the "Hole." The Platte—for they were upon it—was swelled to a rushing, thundering torrent, which rose above its banks in a few moments, and carried every trap away. This, in itself, was not much of a loss, as they had more, and could easily construct as many as were needed. The storm showed them that the spring had now set in, and the trapping season was over. All agreed that, as soon as the rain abated, they would leave their quarters and start for the States.

About a quarter of a mile up the stream their horses were picketed, and visited by Seth each day. At the head waters of a creek, about fifty miles from the Platte, was the war-ground of the Snakes, Cheyennes, Crows, and several other tribes, and our friends were liable at any moment to receive a visit from them; so that, as may be supposed, their situation was not the safest one in the world.

One cold, drizzly afternoon, Seth, with the consent of the rest, built a fire for the purpose of cooking a meal. It was the worst time that could have been chosen, as the smoke ascended very slowly through the orifice, and could be distinctly seen by any one who chanced to be in the neighborhood. In fact, the smoke filled both apartments, so as to nearly suffocate Summerfield, and he besought them to extinguish it; but, as it did not disturb the others, they only laughed at his dilemma. The three, however, resolved to have a whiff of air and passed out, taking their way toward the stream. Vic evidently did not feel at his ease about the smoke and kept his eyes about him. They had hardly reached the stream when they were startled by hearing the firing of guns and the yells of Indians!

"They've got Seth!" exclaimed Vic, darting away.

"The devil!" exclaimed Wandaught, following.

Summerfield sprang after them, and in a moment discerned several dusky forms leaping and firing into the opening from which they had emerged. A second after, Vannoven and Wandaught discharged their pieces, and, with yells of defiance, sprang in among them. There was a sudden clinching, and amid the writhings of several shadowy forms, a bright jet of flame would burst, and now and then a blade would gleam on high, as the combatants closed in their deathly struggles. Summerfield, at first bewildered, soon gained an idea of the state of things, and rushed forward. When he reached them, he saw several forms dart away, and not an Indian remained. During the confusion, Seth had appeared, not injured

in the least. It seemed that the savages had calculated upon discovering all within the "Hole," and had commenced an indiscriminate firing into it. Fortunately, Seth was in the farther apartment, and was untouched. Singularly enough, not a person had been slain. There had been some sharp blows and cuts interchanged, but none of a fatal character. The Indians numbered not over half-a-dozen, and were easily repulsed.

"I calculate these quarters are getting rather hot," remarked Seth, after they had descended and attended to their wounds.

"Yes; I should think a visit from half-a-dozen Indians was a gentle hint that our retreat was disputed," added Summerfield.

"Cuss it!" growled Vic. "They've found out this place, and they'll burn us out ef we don't leave blasted soon. I spose trappin' here's done with."

"Yes; we've got to move traps—that's a panted fact," added Wandaught.

"Wal, boys, what's the word?" asked Seth. "I'm deuced sorry we're found out, but there's no use of growling. We can't help ourselves, and the question is, when you're going to leave?"

"We've got to go to-night. There'll be ten thousand devils down here by daylight, and we'll lose all the skins we've cotched in ten minutes."

"Shouldn't wonder if we did lose our skins," returned Seth.

"We've got to leave to-night, Seth. You'd better go up stream and fotch down the hosses, and we'll pack the skins."

Seth quickly departed for the animals. Vannoven and Wandaught bound the furs into two large bundles, which were so closely pressed that they seemed as solid as wood.

In about half an hour Seth returned, riding upon a horse, and followed by five others. Two of these were pack-horses, while the other spare one had been reserved in case of accident or necessity. It thus came most opportunely to Summerfield. The furs were brought out and strapped upon the two animals of burden. Then Vic carefully deposited the stone in its former position, remarking:

"I spose I'll never go down there agin, but I hope most blastedly the devils won't find you, and I ken snooze in there yet."

They all now mounted their animals, Vic taking the lead. The darkness upon the mountains was intense, and their progress was necessarily slow over the broken fragments of rocks and down the wild declivities of the mountain. A fierce equinoctial storm commenced, and raged furiously through the night. It was the grand combination of rain, thunder, and lightning, that ushered in the spring. Peal after peal burst like the sharp crack of a piece of ordnance, and now and then the white-tongued lightning darted like an arrowy serpent through the forest branches. Once or twice the lurid bolts shivered the trees to splinters above, and there appeared a continual play of fire around the mountain top. The supercharged earth would often return its fiery element to the clouds, and then receive it back again, as though heaven and earth were mutually sporting with the most subtle and terrific power they possessed. The scene was indescribably grand.

But all this was favorable to the fugitives, and they plodded along unmurmuringly—all save Seth, who swore alternately, in his quaint style, first at his horse, then at the elements, then at his companions, who would not hear his complaints, nor appreciate his jokes. The weary night wore on, and the storm began to abate. The booming of the thunder died away into sullen roars, and then, at length, ceased to vex the stillness of the hills. The party had penetrated far into the mountains. The heavy storm must have washed away every evidence of their trail. A feeling of comparative security prevailed. Suddenly Vic—who all the while had kept the lead—came to a halt, ordering the others to do the same, and to dismount. This order somewhat mystified the party, when he curtly added:

"We're goin' to spend the rest of this night here. Stay where you are until I do for the hosses." With this he started off, leading Porcupine, and all the other animals following close. After a brief absence he returned.

"Now, boys," said he, "stick fast to me." And, kneeling on the earth, he commenced crawling carefully forward, followed by his companions, who soon saw by the inky blackness, and dry, hard rock, over which they

were passing, that they were in some sort of a cave. After going twenty or thirty feet, Vic halted and struck a light, and in ten minutes more had a cheerful fire burning.

"Boys," said he, as he noticed the wonder on Summerfield's face (Wandaught was never known to exhibit it), "this is another of Vic's 'holes.' Cac'late we can stay here awhile."

This was agreeable news. The men all enjoyed the fire, until, at last, overcome by fatigue, they fell asleep.

Summerfield was awakened by the coldness, which his dampened clothes gave him. All the rest were up and busy. Seth was preparing the meal; Vic had gone out to see the animals and to bring in the furs. This was soon done, and the meal eaten. Vic told how he had discovered this cave while hunting one day, and knew of several others, equally good and convenient, to which he could resort in case that retreat was discovered by savages.

"You fellers," said he, "I want to stay here, while I go out huntin'. We must git some buffler meat."

So saying, he shouldered his rifle and started out upon the most eventful hunt that he was destined to ever engage in. He little dreamed of the game in store for him.

CHAPTER XII.

VIOLA.

Long and hopefully Viola waited, until it seemed waiting and hoping against hope. The old chief promised that, when it was possible, he should send her with a suitable escort to Fort Leavenworth, where she should be given up to the whites without a ransom.

It seemed hard for the old chief to give up the white maiden. He experienced a genuine affection, and she had grown to be as a child of his own; yet he was not selfish, and resolved that his promise should be fulfilled. The power of his white rival had become nearly as great as his own, and it was a matter of difficulty for him to choose from his warriors two in whom he might place implicit faith. Viola was regarded by more than Redzel with envy. Many savages, indeed, had determined that, before another of their number should obtain possession of her, she should be tomahawked. Yet this was a secret feeling, and never evinced itself openly. Redzel did not dream that eyes other than his own regarded her with passion, and believed that his only obstacle was with the object itself. He had fully made up his mind that, could he not gain possession of her by gentle means, he would by threats and force. But, swiftly and unconsciously, the summer fled, and almost before Viola was aware, winter was upon her. In answer to her inquiry, the chief assured her that it would be madness for her to attempt to reach Fort Leavenworth before the spring opened. The truth of this she was compelled to admit, although it seemed inviting misery and death to remain. She determined to spend the winter almost entirely within the lodge, and, as soon as the spring commenced, compel Mascanagh to fulfil his promise. The winter was mild, and passed by without suffering among the tribe. Buffalo were numerous, and the village always was well supplied.

It was at the close of one of the dreary days of early spring. Viola had spent most of the day in sitting within the lodge, and listening to the blustering weather without. The rain had been falling for nearly a week, and now rattled against the lodge with a mournful monotony. Often the fierce gusts would sweep madly against it, shaking it to the very foundation. Mascanagh was busy in constructing and trying a bow, while his squaw was preparing the evening meal. The two children were playing around their father, while Viola was seated in a corner, gazing listlessly at them. She followed their motions mechanically, but her thoughts were far away. She was indulging in a sort of day-dream, permitting her mind to wander whither it pleased. Often she would find herself surmising of Summerfield. Was he living? Was he a prisoner or free? Was he in the States, and, if so, did his thoughts ever wander out upon the prairie! The thought thrilled Viola, and she dismissed it. Although memory gave her pleasure, doubt would interpose and drive it away. Yet often, indeed, she nurtured the thought, and many a long and dreary hour it had been her only companion.

It was a long time since she had seen Redzel, and she felt no fears of him. She believed he had given over all hopes of obtaining her. On several occasions she had received dark and meaning looks from the warriors, yet, in her innocence she suspected nothing; but she knew that more than one squaw regarded her with a perfectly furious hate, and her womanly instincts taught her to avoid them.

Then, as usual, her thoughts finally settled upon her father, and her probable chances of escaping to him. Five years had passed since she had seen him, and her heart sickened as she reflected upon the time that must necessarily elapse before she could hope again to meet him. She knew not whether he was in Oregon, or had returned to his native home. He might be a prisoner for aught she knew, or, what was as probable, he might have been slain long since by the implacable enemies of the white.

Thus musing, night came on, and she retired to her couch of furs to sleep the sleep of innocence, and to dream the dreams of the hopeful dependant on God's providence. Sleep floated over her with its drowsy wings, and the night deepened. Suddenly she awakened, alarmed and fully conscious. She had not been dreaming, and could not divine the cause. It seemed as though some soft, but icy hand, had glided over her face and recalled her to consciousness. The room was without a ray of light. At first she had determined to rise and secure a light, but she then concluded that there were no grounds for fear, and again abandoned herself to sleep.

When nearly asleep, and exceedingly nervous, her ear caught the noise of a footstep! A fearful suspicion flashed upon her. She felt certain that Redzel was in her room! The very thought sickened her and brought the cold drops to her brow. She moved uneasily to prevent his approach, and concentrated her burning thoughts upon the course left for her to pursue. It seemed that the fevered leaping of her heart would betray her suspicion, and, pressing her hand to her bosom, she invoked the aid of Heaven in this extremity.

At first she determined to scream, but she thought the consequences of this would be instantly fatal. Then she reflected that, as the door was within her reach, to silently open it and steal out. Rising to the sitting position, she reached her hand upward and gave a gentle push. The rough board door opened outward and was never fastened, but it yielded not. She tried again, and with the same result. Finally, placing both hands upon it, she exerted her full strength and found it had been secured. It required her utmost powers to keep herself from swooning when she learned this; but, with a frightful calmness, she sank back again and listened. In a moment she knew the footsteps were approaching! She did not move or speak, but waited. She could hear his hurried, husky breath, as his foot touched her garment. There was then an awful pause, broken only by the fevered breath of both. Viola tried to move, but it seemed some horrible nightmare palsied her. Suddenly she felt a rough hand placed upon her face, and passing over her features. Then again it was withdrawn, and there was another terrible moment, and, as she again heard a movement, her strength returned. She drew a long breath as though awakening, and moving slightly, heard a muttered curse and retreating footsteps. She felt she was saved for a few moments. In a few seconds she found that there was but one course left, and that was to alarm Mascanagh.

She believed that the instant Redzel knew his presence was known to her, he would rush forward and kill her. In the darkness there was a chance to escape. This she determined upon. Drawing her breath, she uttered the agonized words:

"Help! help! murder! murder!" and instantly darted from her couch.

"By —! there's no help for yer!" muttered Redzel, springing forward and burying his knife in the spot where he supposed she lay, then leaping like a panther through the entrance and out of the lodge. In an instant Mascanagh was in the room, and demanded:

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Viola endeavored to answer, but the terrific strain upon her nerves caused her to sink into a deathly swoon. When she recovered, the chief and his squaw were bending anxiously over her. In answer to their inquiries, she pointed silently to the door. In truth, they

had suspected the true facts of the occurrence, and only asked whether she had been harmed. Their swarthy features brightened up with genuine pleasure as she assured them she was uninjured; but the murderous rent in the soft fur showed how narrowly she had escaped. No one doubted who the assassin was. Viola had heard his voice, and was assured.

"O Mascanagh!" exclaimed Viola, clasping his knees, "you want to kill Viola. You promised to send her to her home, and you keep her to be murdered! She will soon die!"

The old chief was visibly affected. He unclasped her hands gently, and replied:

"Mascanagh does what he says he will. The white maiden shall be sent to her friends."

"But when, when?" eagerly demanded Viola.

"When she wishes to go."

"Will you, Mascanagh? Will you?"

The chief bowed his head.

"Let me go this night, then. Yes, this very hour!"

"But the storm rages, and the maiden will be lost in the dark forest."

"I care not for the storm," exclaimed she, frantically. "O God! I have suffered death once. Let me get away from him!"

Her fears and those of Mascanagh seemed to point at that night as the moment of escape, since Redzel would be sure to keep within his cabin to relieve himself of suspicion. The chief passed out, and was gone a full hour, much to the alarm of his squaw and of Viola, who both feared that he had gone to seek the white man. But his return solved all doubts, and made a stir in the lodge. Viola was to fly that very night. Two trusty warriors, with three fleet horses, were secured, and even then awaited the maiden's coming to begin their journey to the East. She was carefully clad in a warm dress of soft leather. A fine blanket was thrown over her shoulders. On her feet the squaw placed a pair of exquisitely worked moccasins. Her limbs were incased in leggings of fawn skin, ornamented with beads and porcupine quills. On her head was a cap of the same beautiful materials. Thus equipped, she looked like a very forest queen—as beautiful as a nymph, and as imposing as a prophetess.

It now only remained to say "good-by!" It was a painful leave-taking.

"God bless you, Mascanagh; good-by," sobbed Viola, pressing his hand and averting her face.

"Good-by to the pale-faced maiden. Mascanagh will see her again in the great Hunting Ground. The Great Spirit will let her enter there. No other pale-face shall see it. Good-by!"

And yet Mascanagh was a man. Within that savage bosom throbbed a heart of humanity. He who had never quailed in the hour of battle—he who had seen the mangled remains of more than one brother without shedding a tear—he who had closed the eyes of a dying child and wept not—bowed his head and wept. Yet it was but for a moment. As if ashamed of his weakness, he raised his head and stood proudly firm, to await her motions. Viola then bade farewell to her mistress. They faltered a few words, and embracing each other, sobbed like children. The two boys, for fear of consequences, had been sent away and were now asleep. Viola, taking a light, entered their room. They lay with their arms clasped around each other's neck, locked in dreamless slumber. Viola stooped and kissed each dusky cheek, and dropping a silent tear in their faces, departed.

"Good-by again!" said she, smiling faintly, as Mascanagh, taking her hand, led her out into the darkness, where she was given into the keeping of the guides. The chief touched his lips reverently to her forehead, pressed her hand to his heart with a fervor quite unusual for a red-man unused to emotions of tenderness, and saying, almost in a whisper, "The Great Spirit hover over thee like a good bird!" left her.

The rain was still falling, and the darkness was thick and impenetrable. Viola clung to the arm of one of her guides, who conducted her safely forward, and in a few moments she heard the faint whinny and stamp of a horse. She was assisted upon the back of this, and handed the rein. The savages then mounted theirs and started forward. Viola's animal needed no guidance, as he followed the others as closely as possible.

As the savages moved forward, they heard the answering neigh of a horse near them, and

spoke to each other of it. But as the darkness was so heavy that they could barely distinguish the heads of their own animals, of course they detected nothing. Several times after, they heard it, and once or twice there were other steps than Viola's animal behind them. This awakened their suspicions, and finally led to the belief that some one was following them. They could not divine how their intentions had been discovered, but were convinced that it must be the white man behind them. This occasioned considerable fear; for, although the savages were considered as among the best warriors of the tribe, yet Redzel held an unbounded influence over them. They had often, with the others, bent to his will, and although numbering two, they yet feared him.

Through that long, stormy night, the party kept slowly and silently forward. The instinct of the horses was their only guide as they moved through the gloomy shadows of the mighty forest. Viola could never catch the forms of her guides, and could only hear the hum of their voices or the dull tramp of their animals. Once or twice they spoke to her, but as she felt in no communicative mood, she did not endeavor to continue the conversation. She was securely and comfortably clothed, and the chilling storm had no effect upon her other than that of gloominess.

At last the rain ceased, and a dull, leaden gray in the east proclaimed that the day was at hand. In a short time, the travellers could discern each other's forms, and in about an hour the savages came to a halt and dismounted for the purpose of resting their animals. One of them patted the steaming sides of his own and approached Viola's. As he did so, he started back with an exclamation of surprise. His companion arose at this, and the two examined the animal more minutely. A few minutes sufficed to show them that a miserable horse had been substituted for the one they had taken. They were too cunning to suppose this the result of chance. They knew that the horse had been substituted by some cunning hand at the moment when they had gone to the lodge for the maiden. This, taken with the footsteps they had heard during the night, convinced them very nearly of the true state of things. To satisfy themselves, one of them took the back track for a considerable distance, but detected nothing suspicious. However, for all this, neither doubted but what they were pursued.

After considerable difficulty, a fire was started, and a piece of meat cooked. Viola partook sparingly, and, as she began to entertain a suspicion of danger, from the actions of the Indians, urged them to pursue their journey. She saw that her own horse was inferior to the others, and felt some alarm at it, but believed that they would not be overtaken should they keep moving steadily forward.

Their course was in nearly an eastern direction, inclining slightly to the south, and would necessarily lead them through the wild regions of that spur of the Rocky Mountains, called the Black Hills. The village was at no great distance west, and early in the day Viola saw the blue heads of the cliffs in the sky, and in some places the white snow-covered caps far up in the heavens. Lower down, the mountain presented a grand, rugged appearance as they approached it. Great, ponderous masses of rocks came out to view, with their outlines sharply defiled, and terrific rents and yawns could be discerned in the sides of the mountain, while cedars and pines, and old forest trees, centuries in growth, towered high upon the sides.

It was nearly evening when they reached the base, where it was concluded to camp for the night. There was some danger of molestation from wandering hordes of savages, but the two guides exercised the utmost caution, and it would have indeed been difficult for a person to come upon them unawares. They had chosen a well-protected spot, and their horses were picketed near at hand, so that they might be reached in case of danger. During the preparation of the evening meal, one of the Indians remained at a short distance as sentinel, and with characteristic caution, one kept guard during the night. The two arranged a pleasant couch with their blankets, and upon it Viola slept sweetly and peacefully till morning. When she awoke it was broad day, and their morning meal was waiting. The storm had abated, and the genial sun was shining down upon them, while the melody of hundreds of

warblers around told that the gloomy reign of winter was over.

They had just commenced eating, when some noise was heard. The savages sprang to their feet and seized their rifles. One started out to discover the cause, when the burly form of Redzel appeared directly upon them. Neither party spoke for a moment, while Viola was speechless with amazement and terror. Redzel seemed to enjoy the consternation his appearance had caused, and after surveying them all a moment, exclaimed with a laugh and oath:

"Wal, I guess you didn't expect to see this chap in these parts, did yer?"

"I did not," returned Viola, white and trembling with indignation; "and nobody wished to see you, I can assure you."

"Wal, now, you don't say, my beauty; but ole Sam wanted to see yer."

"Why does the white man follow the maiden?" asked one of the Indians.

"To catch her ole copperskin, and I'll be cussed if he don't git her too."

"Get who?" demanded Viola, quivering with rage.

"Why, my little Vily," said he, with a horrid grin that disfigured his repulsive face. Then he approached and endeavored to pat her cheek familiarly, but she sprang to her feet as though stung by a serpent.

"Don't touch me, foul monster!" she exclaimed, springing back.

"Whew!" he whistled, raising his hands, "that's purty. That makes you look fine."

There was, indeed, a wild beauty in her appearance as she stood with flashing eyes and scornful lip gazing upon him. Her slight form was proudly erect, and its faultless symmetry was brought out in every motion. She stood a few feet from Redzel, resting on one foot, while on her blanched face there was a calmness and determination that were frightful. Her shawl was at her feet, and her wondrous beauty completely awed the guilty hunter for a moment. It was vice and virtue brought face to face.

"Set down, Vily. Set down! I won't hurt yer!"

But she moved not until he had retreated several steps, when she again seated herself. All this time the two savages remained mute spectators to the scene, each afraid to interfere. It was plain that what violence Redzel might attempt would not meet with opposition from them.

"Why don't you kill that villain?" demanded Viola of them. "He is not fit to live."

Her words seemed to arouse them somewhat, but they made no answer, and only gazed upon her with stoical indifference.

"Kill him, I say! Kill him!" she added, frantically.

"Say, gal," interposed Redzel, "yer mought as well shet up, for them ole copperskins daren't do nothing, and you've got to talk with me."

"Talk with you," repeated she, scornfully, and gazing contemptuously at him. "Talk with you. May Heaven forgive me for ever being guilty of it."

"P'raps it would be best fur yer to think differently," replied Redzel, with a meaning shake of his head.

"What a villain!" muttered Viola to herself, yet loud enough for him to hear.

"Won't you let me set thar too?" asked he, rising and approaching. As quick as lightning she again darted away, and he fell back again.

"Wal," said he, confidently, "yer can be as cantankerous as yer please now, but you've got to come to it sooner nor yer think. Jest remember that."

"God grant that life may leave me before that time comes."

"Yer needn't call on God. He don't care nothin' 'bout yer, and ef he did, I reckon he wouldn't undertake to hinder me."

Viola gazed as if she expected a thunderbolt to strike him for this blasphemy.

"Foul wretch," said she, "that sin must be answered for."

"Wagh! wagh! wagh!" laughed he, "don't talk to me 'bout sin; don't know what 'tis; guess I never done it." Viola was about to speak, but he added:

"Vily, yer mought as well give up them capers. Taint no use. Yer in my hands, and the dociler yer ar the better it'll be for yer."

"I am not in your hands, and I warn you to not imagine so. You have attempted—" She was about to refer to his attempted murder,

but something checked her, and she deemed it best to conceal her knowledge of that occurrence, so far as it related to himself.

Redzel's thick lip curled with a contemptuous grin, and he contented himself for a few moments in glaring like a wild beast at her. Then, suddenly rising, he exclaimed, in a commanding tone, accompanied by a furious gesticulation:

"Say, copperskins, you just make tracks for hum. Yer ain't wanted here. Tell yer boss that Sam Redzel tuk care of this gal."

Viola heard this command with indignant scorn. She did not dream that the savages would heed it, and they did not move, in fact.

"I would tell them again," said she, sarcastically.

"Say, chaps, if yer ain't gone in two seconds, I'll shoot you both," repeated he, growing ghastly with rage. The two Indians arose without a word, mounted and rode away! This movement, so surprising and unexpected, completely paralyzed Viola. She could hardly credit her senses. It seemed impossible that she was alone and in the power of Redzel. But, the two cowardly wretches were gone, and he was gleaming upon her with a demonic smile of satisfaction.

The time for scorn and indifference had passed. Entreaty was the only resource left. She was now in Redzel's power, indeed.

"What will you have with me now?" she asked.

"Wagh! why don't you flare up as you done just now? Why don't you call me all kinds of names? Wagh! wagh!"

"Oh, why am I thus persecuted?" she exclaimed, burying her face, and sobbing aloud. "What have I done, that I should be followed like a beast of prey?"

"No use, gal; you can't come that game. Yer oughter done it afore."

"Have I ever harmed you?" asked she, looking up.

"Not as I knows on."

"Why do you seek to harm me, then?"

"I don't."

"My life was sought," she continued, "and I have tried to escape the danger that threatened me, and would you take me back there again?"

"No; I ain't particular whar I takes yer. Yer can go home for all I cares, but, yer see, I'm goin' with yer."

"Will you then permit me to go on?" she asked, eagerly.

"Didn't I say so!"

"Oh, thank you! thank you! Let us start, then."

"Wagh! changed your tune a little! Thought you would after a while."

Viola pretended to not hear this insult, and approached her horse to mount. Redzel stepped forward, but she was too quick, and leaped on his back in an instant.

"Now we'll soon reach Fort Leavenworth," said she, pleasantly, with a forced smile. The hunter muttered something unintelligible to her as he mounted his beast and set forward. Viola noticed the direction taken, and saw that he was really proceeding on his way toward her destination. As she gazed back and saw, in the distance, the two savages galloping leisurely along, she felt an almost irresistible impulse to turn and urge her horse toward them. But she saw that such a thing would be madness, as her animal was much inferior to Redzel's, and she could not hope to escape him. Suddenly, a strange idea struck her.

"I think you might exchange horses with me," said she, pleasantly. "I'm heartily tired of riding this miserable beast."

"Is yer hoss 'bout tuckered out?" he asked.

"Just look and see whether he isn't," was her meaning answer.

"Wal, mine isn't," said Redzel, riding up beside her, "and so I'll just take yer up on mine, and we'll go faster."

"Oh, no! don't! I am sure mine can carry me. I would not load yours more."

"Yer needn't be afraid of that. Yer don't weigh 'nough to make him feel it."

"Please don't," pleaded Viola, as she read his determination in his eyes.

"Oh, yas!" he replied, not heeding her supplication.

"Don't! don't! don't! I pray of you."

But he reached out and placed his rough arm around her and endeavored to lift her from her seat. His touch seemed to fill Viola with fire, and in her struggles she struck him

full in the face. Her screams frightened the horses and separated them for a moment, causing Redzel to loose his hold. But, giving vent to a horrid oath, he jerked his horse's head around, and, mad with the pain Viola had given him, he reached out and struck her! The blow was not severe, but it sent a twinge of pain through her; and, as he again placed his arm around her, she uttered a wild, unearthly scream, that echoed far up the mountain side. But, instead of checking Redzel, it only spurred him on. He swore that her resistance should avail nothing, and concentrating his strength, he was just lifting her to his horse, when he was startled by a commanding voice:

"Hello, there! Thunder and blastation, drop that gal mighty quick."

Redzel did drop her as though a bullet had struck him, and gazing quickly around, he saw, not twenty feet distant, Vic Vannoven and Seth Potter, gazing at him. A bolt from Heaven could not have amazed him more. The latter stood with one foot advanced, his rifle cocked, and a rigid determination stamped upon his countenance. His conical hat was thrown back upon his head, and his closed teeth showed that he was in no trifling mood. Vic stood in as threatening an attitude, with the muzzle of his rifle pointed toward Redzel, and his finger upon the trigger. Seth had repeated the command, and Vic added:

"Come here, little one, that cuss shan't hurt yer."

CHAPTER XIII.

FACE TO FACE AGAIN.

For some minutes, the parties gazed at each other in silence. It took Redzel some time to realize that his two enemies were before him, and that his intended prey had escaped him. Viola was first to break the silence.

"Save me! Oh, save me!" she exclaimed, rushing toward Vannoven.

"You shan't be hurt, my little 'un," said he, gently pushing her behind him, and still keeping his eye steadily upon Redzel. The latter, when he saw this movement, gave utterance to an oath, and forced his animal forward, intending to pass by the hunter and seize her; but Seth caught the horse by the bit and threw him back upon his haunches, nearly dislodging Redzel in the act.

"Sam Redzel, you're cotched," said Vic, calmly. "If you touch that creetur, I'll blow your ugly carcass to—"

"I'll have her, or my name ain't Redzel," he exclaimed fairly livid with rage.

"I calculate as how there'll be somebody else to say something about that," replied Seth nervously fingering the hammer of his rifle. He trembled with some emotion, but not with fear.

"Wagh! that you, Crooked Pegs?"

"It's pretty sartin it's the chap that gave you a fine dressing once."

Redzel turned to Vic.

"See here, Vic," said he, lowering his tone, "you'n I never had no trouble, not at all; but that gappin' fool has got to squar' counts with me some time; but, Vic, I don't think it best fur you and me to git into a squabble."

"Do yer 'spose I'm afeard on yer?" asked Vic, contemptuously.

"Mebbe not; but then 'tain't best; there's more nor me."

"I know what you mean. You've jined the red-skins, and want us to know you've got 'em to yer back."

"That's the talk, 'zactly."

"And do you 'spose, Sam, you're goin' to come that game over us? Ef you gets this creetur, it'll be arter me and this chap are out the way. She's goin' back with us. I don't care about puttin' a piece o' lead through yer, but it won't take many more yer tricks to make me do it."

"It wouldn't go hard for me to draw bead on him," said Seth, stepping about as though his rifle burned his hands.

"Vic, are you in airnest? Does yer mean sure what yer says?" said Redzel, in a subdued tone.

"Just 'speriment a little, and see whether I doesn't."

"Vic, if yer don't let me have that gal, I'll burn you and that fool in less nor a week."

"And, ef you touch 'that gal,' I'll shoot yer in less nor a minute."

"I'll bring a thousand Crows down here,

and we'll foller yer to the Missipp, ef we don't catch yer before, and I swear you'll both burn."

"Sam Redzel," said Vannoven, with startling calmness, "we've talked long 'nough, an' ef you say much more you wont get the chance. It won't take much for me to bring you off that hoss a little quicker than you'd like."

Redzel knew enough of the hunter's nature to comprehend that this was no idle threat. Yet he still believed he could awe him into fear by threats, and a declaration of his intentions in case he persisted in protecting Viola.

"I jes wanted yer to know what I'll do, that all. You won't be the furst whites I've led the copperskins aginst."

"Vic," said Seth, raising his rifle excitedly, "ef you'll say the word, I'll stop that talk thundering soon!"

"No, let the cuss go. Sam," said he, turning, "I jes want yer to understand what I'll do ef you say much more. You've got an account to settle with me, and after yer done with this chap, I'll settle it. Ef yer wants to get off, you'd better be movin'."

"I'll go, but—" a meaning shake of the head told the rest.

Vannoven surveyed him as he turned, and, as an idea struck him, he called out:

"Hold on a minute."

Redzel checked his horse and wheeled him around. He expected that Vic had changed his mind, and intended to give him Viola. But he was somewhat surprised to see both him and Seth standing with their rifles pointed toward him.

"I'll give yer two seconds," said the former, "to get off that hoss and make tracks. Ef you ain't off then, you'll be helped off."

Redzel comprehended this command, and, without endangering his life by testing its earnestness, he slid off and walked silently away.

"That'll be this little one's," said Vic, "but don't touch him till Sam's out of sight. Keep yer peeper peeled, or he'll turn and pick you off."

Redzel walked slowly a short distance, then suddenly turned, bringing his rifle to his shoulder, expecting to find them unprepared; but this motion of his had been anticipated, and he knew better than to fire. He reluctantly lowered his piece and increased his gait. Vic and Seth watched him until he was barely visible upon the prairie. The latter then approached his animal, which had hardly stirred since he had been left. As Seth took his bridle, he gazed again toward Redzel. He saw that he was standing and watching his motions. He saw his arms move, then a red tongue of fire flashed apparently from his face, a blue jet of smoke curled slowly upward, and in an instant the faint report of his rifle was heard. It was a foolish venture, however, for the distance was great, and the bullet sped wide of its mark.

Seth, at this point, led the animal to her. The one which she had ridden was allowed to wander off, as he was not needed. Seth was impressed and affected by the beauty before his eyes, and seemed extremely anxious to make an impression in turn. Lifting his hat, and making a very humble bow, he said:

"Miss—I don't know yer name—allow me—allow me to be so condescending as to assist you to get on—to mount this solidungulous quadruped."

"Beavers! who'd a thort yer could talk Dutch?" exclaimed Vic, opening his eyes with wonder.

"Mr. Vannoven, that ere's the language of cultivated society," returned Seth, scornfully, and with an air of extreme condescension.

"He's a little green—kinder soft," said Vic, to Viola, who had mounted, and was waiting their movements with a pleasant smile. Seth turned, and seeing her, said:

"So, you've ascended. I guess we'll go on, then, toward our far distant destination."

"May I ask where that is?" queried she.

"Not fur," returned Vic. "We've a couple more chaps a ways off."

"But, I mean, are you on your way to the States?"

"Yes; we're on our way thar."

"Thank Heaven again! Then I shall see home, after all."

Vic now started forward, followed by Viola's animal, while Seth walked by its side. It was necessary to proceed with great caution, as the way was difficult, while the mountains contained enemies, both animal and human. Seth, conceiving that a capital opportunity was now given to make an impression, availed himself

of it, and grew exceedingly loquacious, expatiating upon everything that came into his head. Several times he asked Viola for her history, but did not give her a chance to speak a dozen words before he interrupted, and rattled away again:

"You see, Miss I-don't-know-your-name, this is a wonderful country in these particular, necessitous parts. There isn't an inch but what I've trodden and examined. Mr. Vannoven thar, ahead, I brought out here when he's a boy, and taught him how to overcome, subdue, and conquer the aboriginals of this country. We are on our journey to reach and converse with two other personages, whom both of each I taught also, likewise. One fellow—Wandaught—are a fine one, and you will admire and appreciate; but the other are foolish, exceedingly, indeed." He was becoming jealous. "He thinks and esteems, and estimates himself admirably handsome, and—and—and so forth; but he ain't. I would not notice him, not at all, if I was not you. You will see at once, immediately, when you first see him, that he is the one what thinks he's something more than the rest of these. He ain't smart neither, by no means, not at all, nor—"

"Shet that blab, or you'll make the little one wish she war with Sam agin," cried Vic.

"Oh! I am very much amused," returned Viola. She was indeed amused, and listened with becoming gravity to her loquacious companion. Seth curled his lip with proud scorn, as he remarked:

"You must excuse his manners. He ain't never been among cultivated persons, and inasmuch as he cannot appreciate the good breeding evinced forth in others, I find it sometimes occasionally at times quite difficult and—and—quite difficult to listen in silence, without not disapproving him for his conduct at times upon such occasions. How did you say you escaped from the Engins?"

"It was through the kindness of an Indian chief, whose good-will—"

"Vic, Mr. Vannoven, I should have observed, is rather peculiar, and funny, at times, upon certain seasons, in his general comportment and behavior also. But, however, notwithstanding, in spite of this, you will perhaps, without doubt, not find no trouble with him. That young chap will be the only one that you will not like."

Thus Seth rattled on, till Vic suddenly halted and raised his hand as a signal for the others to stop.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

AFTER Vic and Seth had left the cavern, Summerfield and Wandaught remained inside, arranging things so as to make their stay more comfortable. The cavern extended some thirty feet back, gradually enlarging and widening from the entrance, until it terminated in an apartment of considerable size. Here, in one corner, their furs were placed, so as to form, with their blankets, several easy and comfortable couches. There was no escape for the smoke save through the entrance, which, of course, was slow enough. Yet, for all this, not one found any difficulty of respiration when a bright, crackling fire burned hour after hour within the apartment.

In the absence of Seth, Wandaught acted the part of cook, and soon had a steaming meal prepared. This was devoured without much ceremony, and in the afternoon of the day it was concluded to venture forth in the mountains, agreeing to be absent but an hour or two. After emerging from the mouth of their rude abode, they halted for a moment to decide upon the best course to pursue.

"Perhaps we should separate at this point," remarked Summerfield.

"Wall, I'm willin'," returned Wandaught.

"But we must agree upon some signal. One of us might get into difficulty and need the assistance of the other. Suppose we agree upon firing a gun as the signal of distress?"

"That won't do. Thar mought some hear the shooter as we wouldn't want. Ef I wants to see you, I'll give the whistle you've heard me give, and ef you wants me you kin do the same. I'll know what it means, and be on hand in less nor no time."

"That is understood, then; and let us now start."

With this, the two started forward, their directions diverging considerably at the commencement. Wandaught's face was toward the mountain top, while Summerfield proceeded in nearly a direct line ahead. It was his intention to visit the cañon of the Platte. He had been near it several times, but had had no opportunity of giving it more than a passing glance. It was at no great distance, and its thunder could be plainly heard at the cavern.

Pressing cautiously forward, he reached the cañon in the course of a half hour, and lying down upon it, he felt amply repaid for the danger he had passed through to reach it.

The waters of the Platte are as clear as crystal, and it sweeps swiftly and silently along over its bed of gravel and pebbles, until it reaches the Black Hills. Here its volume is suddenly compressed into a narrow tunnel-like passage, and thunders along with inconceivable velocity. On either side, huge walls of red sandstone and siliceous limestone rise, and in some places are so close as to nearly touch. The waters of the cañon are very deep, and as they are hurled along through the jagged passage, in some places become one mass of boiling, surging foam. At several points, Summerfield saw the thick mist arising from the commotion, and where he stood the spray was scattered plentifully over him. Then at some places the walls retreat, and the emerald waters lose their froth and foam, and glide in swift silence along, like a river of molten glass. Soon this becomes agitated, and in a short distance becomes as wild and tumultuous as before. Thus, for more than two miles, the Platte makes its way through the Black Hills, when it reaches a natural bed again, and expanding, moves forward the same as before. Its egress from the mountains is but a short distance above the celebrated Warm Spring.

Summerfield remained at this wonderful spot until he saw the night was not far distant. Then he proceeded leisurely toward the cavern, keeping, however, a cautious lookout for danger.

He had nearly reached the cavern, when he heard the whistle of Wandaught. He halted to ascertain its direction, and heard it again, given something like the tones of a warning. This sufficed to put him on the guard as he set out toward it. It sounded directly above him, and at no great distance. As he worked his way up, he returned it at intervals, and the two thus kept an understanding of their relative position. After going about a quarter of a mile, he passed around a rock and came upon Wandaught, standing with his rifle ready cocked in his hand.

"What's the matter!" asked Summerfield in a whisper.

"—sh! I want to show yer a sight."

"Well, let's see it."

"Now be powerful keeful, for it's a sight that'll make you open yer peepers."

Thus saying, the hunter sank upon his knees and commenced creeping stealthily forward. Summerfield did the same, wondering what it all meant. Wandaught passed but a short distance in this manner, when he arose silently to his feet, motioning for Summerfield to remain still. It was now quite dark, and objects were growing indistinct in the shade of the forest. In a few seconds, Wandaught turned and motioned for Summerfield to stand beside him.

"—sh! be keeful!" said he, as he arose to his feet.

Thus speaking, he parted the undergrowth, and stepped back for Summerfield to look. As he gazed, he saw, a short distance off, a large fire burning, and around it, extended upon the ground, a score of savages, painted and arrayed in their war costume. He counted over twenty before he withdrew. Wandaught turned, and the two retreated as silently as they came. The forest had become now sombre and gloomy, and it was quite difficult to make their way over the twisted roots and irregular masses of stone. Several times they stumbled, and, when at a short distance only from the Indian encampment, by a sad misstep, Summerfield pitched forward upon his face and discharged his rifle by the concussion. Almost simultaneously there arose a series of wild whoops and yells, and the savages plunged toward them in pursuit.

"Make for the rocks," said Wandaught, disappearing like a shot in the darkness. Summerfield sprang up, but found he had sprained his ankle severely, and concluded it the safer plan to remain where he was. Creeping several feet, he lay down under the face of a rock,

with his face turned upward. In this position, he saw five dusky forms of his enemies leap past within as many feet of him. He hardly dared to breathe until certain there were no more in the immediate neighborhood. Then he arose and limped painfully and slowly forward. Often he paused and sank to the earth as he fancied the approach of a foe. Once, he believed he was seen, and gave up in despair, but it was only his imagination, and at last, after two hours of mental and bodily suffering, he reached the cavern and crept anxiously in. This, to his surprise and consternation, was empty, and it was plain had not been visited since his departure. He expected certainly to find Wandaught there, and probably Seth and Vannoven. The absence of the three was unaccountable. The former, he believed, was captured by the Indians, and perhaps scalped and slain. Under this impression, he commenced starting a fire. In doing so, he struck a body and stumbled over it. Thinking it one of the bundles of furs that had been displaced, he paid no attention to it, but kindled the fire. As it blazed up, he turned to replace it, but started as he saw that it was the body of Wandaught.

"Why, Jim, what's the matter?" asked Summerfield, anxiously.

There was no answer save a deep, heavy breath, and he repeated the question. Failing to receive an answer again, he turned him over on his face, and saw a scene that thrilled him with horror. The hunter appeared literally cut and hewed to pieces. His dress was in shreds, and the flinty floor was covered and clotted with blood. He slowly opened his eyes, and closing them, murmured something that was unintelligible to Summerfield. The latter took his hand and found his pulse strong and steady, as though the system were suffering no pain or torture.

This was too much for Jim. He suddenly doubled up, and fairly screamed with laughter. "Oh, you're a great doctor. Didn't know if I was alive or dead. Why didn't you put a coal of fire under my nose. That would 'a told if I war playing possum," he kindly added. "I's hurt some, George, but nothin' to make me sick of grub. Most of this blood on my carcass come off the red-skins."

I had an orful tussle with a couple, and it wa'n't fur from here neither. I's thinkin' as how I'd giv 'em the slip sorter nice like, when a couple pounced slam on to me. It took me by s'prise first, but I give one a dig that made 'im see stars and thunder. I thort t'other would run when I done this, but he stuck to me like mad. He's the hardest redskin I ever had hold on. We pulled and pushed and bit and scratched and tore and dug and fit, till we blowed like ba'rs. I didn't know, once, but what old Jim'd have to give under; but I come the back action over him and got 'im down and my knife into his hide. Wal, sir, I had to set down and blow awhile afore I could git 'nough gumption to lift his ha'r; but arter awhile I done it, and tugged for hum. I found I had one or two ugly cuts, and felt kind o' squeamish when I crawled in here. Arter blowin' awhile, I heard you come in. I's agwine to speak but felt sorter weak, and thort I'd let you find out fur yourself. Howsumever, I wa'n't as bad as I pertended, and could 'o throwed yer when I let you turn me over. I'd got a good deal o' the redskins on me, and thought as how it wouldn't hurt you much ef I should skeer you considerable."

"I wonder what has become of Vic and Seth?"

"They're all right. Guess they steered clear o' the devils."

"You think, then, they did not encounter them?"

"Can't tell, you know; but if they have, guess they're kicking yet."

Thus most of the night was spent in conversing and surmising. Wandaught recounted several adventures, and Summerfield learned much of his former life, although the trapper, as usual with his class gave but a very meagre idea of it. At last they stretched themselves out with the intention of sleeping. But in a few minutes afterward, Vic's well-known voice was heard at the entrance.

"Hollo, in thar? Anybody 'bout?"

"Nobody here!" returned Wandaught.

"You and Summerfield come out here."

Wandaught passed out, followed closely by Summerfield. They saw Vic standing by his own horse, while Seth was assisting a female to alight. The face of the latter was turned so as to conceal her features, and Summerfield asked, in a whisper:

"Where did you come across that person?"

"Sam Redzel had her."

At this moment Seth approached with her. Summerfield started and turned pale. He looked again. Could it be possible? Yes; there was no mistake. It was Viola. She recognized him at the same moment.

"Why, Viola, is this you?" he said, stepping forward and taking her trembling hand within his trembling own.

"Whose surprise is the greatest?" asked she, with a deep blush.

"Where is it you have come from?"

"These two friends rescued me and brought me a willing prisoner here. You remember my capture—or don't you?" she asked, in a lower tone.

"I guess I haven't forgotten it," returned Summerfield, with a smile.

"Well, I have been a prisoner ever since then. The chief, however, promised me my freedom, and I was on my way to obtain it, when a man named Redzel, drove my two Indian guides home, and took charge of me himself, and was with me but a short time when these two good companions of yours rescued me from him."

This reminded Summerfield that he ought to explain to the others the circumstances of their acquaintance. During the conversation, Vic and Wandaught had busied themselves with talking, gazing, however, at intervals toward them, while Seth was nearly stupefied with wonder. He so far forgot the politeness and good breeding he had endeavored to evince thus far, as to throw his hat back from his forehead, drop his gun, run both hands in his pockets, and, spreading his feet apart, gaze in silent consternation at them. At last he comprehended that the two were old acquaintances, that he had made a fool of himself in striving to prejudice Viola against Summerfield, and with a muttered "Humph!" turned and strode away.

Beckoning to the hunters they approached, when George freely told them of his prior relations with the young lady, and strove to express his thanks for her delivery. But the honest Vic would hear of no thanks, and at once led the way into their retreat. Seth brought up the rear—the picture of comical inquisitiveness and mortification.

The two hunters, although unused to female society, were considerate and kind-hearted, and showed their good intention in every word and movement. There was considerable restraint, but it was more self-imposed than otherwise. Vic, with the rough gallantry of his nature, spread his blanket upon the rock, and depositing several furs with it remarked:

"Thar, Miss Vennond, that's yours as long as we stay here, and ef a feller touches it—I'll—jes see how you like it."

"Oh, thank you! thank you," replied she, seating herself upon it. "It is exquisite, but wouldn't you as lief call me what you did before you learned my name?"

"Yes, and a good 'eal ratherer too. So, my little one, you like it, does yer?"

"It couldn't be better, I am sure."

"That's good, and sounds jest like yer."

The others had seated themselves upon the opposite side of the cavern. Summerfield, seeing that Vic was engaged with Viola, commenced a conversation with Wandaught, while Seth sat apart in dignified scorn. As it was growing late in the day, Vic turned to him and observed:

"Hadn't we better have some feed—sunk-thin' to eat, I mean?" asked Vic turning to Seth.

"I s'pose so," he returned curtly, stroking the yellow tuft on his chin, and gazing in an opposite direction.

"Wal, why don't you git it, then?"

"That ain't my business, I rather ca'clate," he returned, stroking more vigorously, and darting a glance at Viola, to see its effect upon her.

"No, Vic," interrupted Wandaught, "you know he tumbles off his hoss and boo—"

"Did you say you wanted supper?"

"I rather guess I did?"

"Oh! I didn't understand you. Shall we cook our game?"

"Yas, an' be quick."

He passed outside, where he usually cooked the food, and during his absence a general conversation ensued. Vic related the particulars of his rescuing Viola.

"Do you believe he will attempt to capture us, and search these mountains with a band of Crows at his back?"

"In course he will. Sam's a chap what does what he says. He'll sarch the mountains fur a month with a lot o' Crows at his back, an' fore he gits us, thar'll be a lot more of crows and buzzards at him," said Vic, with a meaning look.

"His power is unbounded," observed Viola.

"In truth, I believe in case of a rupture among the Indians, he would have as many adherents as Mascanagh. The chief sent a couple of his most loyal warriors with me, and at a word from Redzel they turned and left me in his power."

"Did he misuse you?" asked Summerfield.

"He struck me once, that was all!"

All three started as though some one had struck them.

"Strike yer, did you say?" asked Wandaught simultaneously with Summerfield.

"I struck him at first," returned Viola, with a laugh.

"I hope he will come, then!" said Summerfield, compressing his lips with passion.

"Why, boys, and my little one," remarked Wandaught, starting up, "yer don't know Sam Redzel as I does. I come across him in Louisville, some years ago. He war walkin' the street with me one day, when an ole feller stumbled against 'im—jest happened to, you know. I cotched Sam, or he'd tumbled, and hung fast to keep 'im from hurtin' the ole man. I seen he eyed him orful close, but I didn't think he'd do nothin'. The next mornin' thar's a mighty fuss all over the place, when some one found the ole chap had been murdered. I had my idees about it, but didn't say nothin' till we got out on the prairie, when I axed Sam if he didn't do it. I thort he'd tear me to pieces; but that night, when he got asleep, I heard 'im say 'nough to let me know that he'd done it, sure. I found out, too, that that war't the only time. I heard 'im talkin' once about some woman he'd killed. Howsumever, I didn't let 'im know, arter that, that I thought he's bad. I yumered 'im and got along as nobody else couldn't. He told me that he used to live in Philadelphia or some place out thar, and gittin' sick of it, went to trappin'; but he used to be so skeerish when he got in the States, that I know'd sunkthin' else made 'im leave. One night he come to me in Independence, a good many years ago, in a great hurry, and told me he wanted to start fur trappin' ground right off. He wouldn't wait even till mornin', but wanted me to start that hour. I axed him what's up, and he wouldn't tell nothin', and said ef I didn't go, he'd start himself. I hadn't been in long with my furs, and it wasn't time to start agin fur two or three months. So I told 'im I couldn't do it. He was mighty mad first, but kinder laughed purty soon, and told me he's goin' to start, and axed me ef thar war anybody axin' about 'im, to keep mum. He tole me whar to find 'im when I got out here, and went off in a big hurry. The next mornin', sure, I seen two fellers pokin' round and inquirin' arter a feller that seemed mighty like Sam. They had some papers stuck up that folks said told about Sam, and said if anybody'd cotch 'im, they'd get a pile. These chaps, with brass stars, looked through every house in the place, but it war't no use. Sam warn't thar, and they didn't arrest nothin' but the attention of the women, which they say is all them does want ar out East. Thar war a good many what had seen Sam about with me, and I got pulled and hauled by them ossifiers, as they call 'em, but in course I didn't know nothin' 'bout Sam, and tole 'em so, and they had to go back without 'im."

"When the time come, I picked up my fixens and started for the trappin' grounds, and sure enough I found Sam out here. When I tole 'im what a fuss had been made about 'im, he seemed to be mad 'nough to shoot me. He staid the season with me, an' went back agin to Independence, but he didn't stick thar long. I tried to get rid of 'im, but he allars jined me up 'mongst the Delawares, arter I got well out on the perarie. One day Summerfield, here, met me an' tole me as how he'd heard I's a trapper, an' wanted to know what I'd ax 'im ef I'd let 'im and a friend go 'long with me once. I tole 'im I didn't care 'bout sich company, as thar war a heap o' trouble, but the reason I didn't want 'im war cause I know'd ef he had any sperit, he an' Sam would be at it. He said, howsumever, he'd pay me a pile, an' stuck an' hung so, that I tole 'im I didn't care, jest to git red on 'im. The next mornin' he come round to whar I's hangin' out, and had that crooked-legged gawk with 'im. I tole 'im I guess he'd better stay whar he war, but it

war't no use. He had a couple o' the purtiest hosses I ever sot eyes on, an' offered me one jes like 'em; but I tole 'im thar war't nothin' goin' like Buster. He give me a bushel of the best baccy I ever seed, and kinder got inter my 'fections. We started one fine mornin', an' I struck north to git out the way of Sam, for I know'd ef he jined us thar'd be a muss, sure; but, skin me—I didn't say that—ef we didn't come 'cross him the next day. As soon as I had a chance, I tole Summerfield to be keerful, coz he's a b'ar when his dander war up. I didn't think o' tellin' Crooked Pegs, coz he didn't look as though he'd hurt a beaver; but I soon found out he's the one I orter told; fur yer remember, boys, the squabble he and Sam got into. I didn't think Crooked Pegs had much spunk till then, but he doubled Sam up as he never war before."

At this point Seth entered, bearing a steaming piece of meat. The choicest portion was given to Viola, of course. Seth had lost his amusing affectation and was himself again. The rude meal was enlivened by pleasant conversation, and far into the day, the parties sat and were unmindful of the lapse of time.

Then the three men dropped, as if by accident from the little circle, leaving the loved and beloved together. Was there any mistaking of their relations to one another? Untutored as were Vic and Jim, they still knew enough of heart life to read in the eyes, in the words, in the exquisite gentleness of George and Viola, that their friendship was of a holy nature, and the rough men were as respectful and considerate as women. The lovers were at last alone together; most trying but most blissful moment!

They commenced a commonplace conversation, which terminated in what might be expected. We might record it, but it has always been a question with us whether it is right to transcribe a conversation which should never be heard by a third party. There is a sacredness and interest about it that can never be felt by the reader, and many would regard with disinterestedness what were words fraught with hope and happiness to the hearers. Summerfield spoke of the feelings she had awakened when he first met her; of the many hours he had spent in thinking of her alone; how his love had never slumbered, but increased steadily and surely until the present time, and ended by offering her the pure undivided love of his heart. And Viola, after a few minutes of silence, too full of bliss to prevent her speaking, told Summerfield the same story that she had listened to. She confessed that she had loved him from the first; and prayed for and hoped to meet him, and yet was often frightened when her own nature told her of the deep passion that she was nourishing; she had striven to forget it, but could not, and finally ended by accepting and returning his love.

Then Summerfield spoke of his distant home, of his adored sister, and declared that, were she living, he would only need Viola's presence to complete his happiness; and she related her own history, and stated that, when certain of the fate of her father, and with his consent, if living, Summerfield might consider her as belonging to him. This was followed by plans, and questions, and answers, that need not be referred to. It seemed that they had not said much, when Vic and Wandaught returned, evidently to discuss matters of importance.

"Boys, the question is, what we're going to do? How long we're going to stay here? Now Sam Redzel 'll be here afore we could git out o' sight the mountains, and he'll hunt a week fur us ef he thinks we're 'bout. It won't do for us to start now, fur ef we did he'd be arter us, and we'd lose all our furs, sure, if he didn't fotch us. We've got to stay here till we make him think we ain't here. He'll wait a long while fore he gives us up, and we've got to keep mighty close. Ef anything turns up so that any of yer are treed in here, I'll show yer the way yer can give 'em the slip and git off cl'ar ef you works right."

Here the speaker arose, and approaching Viola, lifted a loose rock, disclosing a dark rent in the flinty floor.

"This," said he, "goes down a few feet and then turns off, and arter goin' under some stones and bushes, you come out behind a big stone, a purty good distance from whar we come in. I don't know how it got here, but I s'pose some fellers have been here and used it like they did the 'Hole.' I staid here one winter when I's trappin', and found a good many qua'r things scratched up thar, that

looked as if some feller mought hev made 'em with his knife."

"Where are they? Perhaps they may afford some clue to a strange history," asked Summerfield.

"Right over my little one's head."

Summerfield seized a brand and approached the spot indicated. As he raised the torch, he saw a number of rude letters scratched over quite a space, and after considerable difficulty he managed to trace the words:

"Alvarado Gentillino, C. M. Harrison, F. Holmes, 1828. Got drove in here by Injins, and after two days they tried to burn us out. At night we dug out and got away."

"That explains it," said Summerfield, after he had read it aloud. "A couple of fellows were compelled to make that passage for themselves, and, after digging it, have recorded the fact there."

"I thort as how that place wa'n't allers thar. Wal, you see, it mought be of some use to yer at some time. I happened to see the stone loose one day, an' arter lookin' round found what it war. Wal, as I's sayin'," he resumed, "we've got to stay here some time, though p'raps we kin go to-morrer, pervided Sam ain't about. Me an' Jim 'll look 'round and see ef thar's any sign, an' ef thar isn't by to-morrer we'll be off."

This all acknowledged, was the best plan to be pursued, and, without more words, Vic left the cave. The animals, Seth stated, were in as secure a place as were their owners, being in a gap between two huge walls of rock, which was only approached by a rough, irregular footpath.

Vannoven had not been gone more than a couple of hours, when he returned.

"See nary thing?" asked Wandaught, carelessly.

"Yes, sir; I've seen 'nough I reckon. Sam Redzel ain't half a mile off, an' he's got over twenty Crows with 'im, an' thar's devil in his eyes. I seen 'em comin', an' waited till they stopped, when I counted 'em. They're all daubed with war-paint, and are goin' to give this ole mountain an overhaulin'. I'm afraid, boys, we'll have to close in with 'em."

"Do you know how they intend to proceed?" asked Summerfield.

"I s'pose they'll hunt one by one till we're found, when they'll come down on us."

"This yer'd be fun," said Wandaught, playing idly with his knife, "ef it wa'n't fur this little one. In course it won't do to get in a scrimmage now. We've got to keepsly and git off ef we can."

"Heaven grant that we may escape that man," said Viola, fervently. "Suppose he gets me again, George!" added she, in a husky whisper, looking in his eyes.

"He will not get you," returned he, with emphasis.

"No," said she, after a second, with solemn slowness, "he will never obtain me alive."

"Please don't feel thus," added Summerfield, alarmed at her manner. "You are safe with us certainly, dear Viola."

"Don't be skeert," said Vic, noticing her appearance. "Sam Redzel won't git his hands on yer as long as we're 'bout 'im. I guess we'll be 'bout awhile too."

"I am sure I am safe with you; it was but a momentary fear," returned Viola, much affected at this exhibition of good will.

"I'll be darned if I won't blow every Engin to thunder and lightning," exclaimed Seth, excitedly, and forgetting himself entirely, "before they shall hurt you." This remark produced a smile from all.

"That's so!" he added shaking his head and bringing his clenched hand down upon his knee. "And if you don't believe it, just wait till the chance comes."

"I don't doubt it, Seth," replied Summerfield, "neither do I doubt the willingness of every one here to defend Viola even unto death."

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Vic. "You ain't skeert now, little one, are you?"

"No, no; I feel no concern for myself; but I fear that some of you will have to suffer. I have a dread that one at least among us will fall by the hands of that man or his followers."

"And what of it?" queried Wandaught. "I'm sure I wouldn't feel squeamish ef I knowed it war g'wine to be me. We've all got to go under some time, and what's the odds when it is? Thar ain't nobody, 'cept p'raps them here, what would cry much over Jim Wandaught,

and ef I had my choice, I wouldn't keer a beaver skin when I gits throwed in my tracks."

"That's my idee," added Vic; "I s'pects some these times the varmins will get Vic, and I don't stop to think or care about the time. Ef I's sure my little one 'd git home all right, I wouldn't feel sorry ef the Enjins should wipe me out; but when they go at the business, in course I can't help tryin' to do them the same favor, and I'm thinkin' when Vic does go under there'll be some tall kickin' and fightin'."

"I don't know as I am particularly anxious about giving up the ghost," remarked Seth; "and, come to think, I'll be blasted ef I want to yet awhile. There is a gal—a lady, I mean—down in Louisville that would die ef she should learn Seth Potter was no more." The fellow heaved a great sigh after he had delivered himself of this, and looked at Viola. It was his last attempt to produce an "impression" upon her. He believed that if she entertained any passion for him, this remark would call it forth. She caught his glance and replied:

"I hope you will see her, Seth—for you deserve to—and make her heart glad."

"I hope so," he replied, solemnly.

"Wal, thar ain't none of these gals to care fur me," said Vic.

"Nor me nuther," added Wandaught.

"There is one who *always* will," said Viola, earnestly.

"I believe that," said Vic, with feeling.

Several times one of the hunters crept to the mouth of the cave to look out for danger. Late in the afternoon Wandaught detected an Indian a long way off, but none of them came near enough to awaken any apprehension.

After a long time night settled over the mountains. All felt that another day was to dawn upon them. A faint moon had arisen, which rendered the ponderous faces of the rocks visible, and their gloomy shadows more gloomy than before. Seth set out to visit the animals, but he proceeded with extreme caution and spent a half hour in passing the hundred yards. He was fully armed with his rifle and a couple of knives, for he deemed it highly probable that he should encounter some enemy before returning. He reached the spot, however, without detecting anything suspicious, and passed down among the horses. They all knew him and manifested no fear at his approach. He patted each one, and seeing that they were provided for during the night, was about to turn and ascend, when one of them gave a snort of alarm. As Seth stood in a sort of yawn or rent, it was perfectly dark around him, while above he could see the blue piece of sky and the edges of the rocks clearly defined against it. As he gazed up, he saw the head of an Indian above peering down upon him. He watched a moment, and saw it gradually slide into view until fully one half of his body stood in bold relief against the sky.

The Indian remained motionless a moment, save that he kept his head swaying like a snake's about to dart upon his prey. He then bounded lightly down. Seth crouched so as to keep him against the sky, and waited his approach. Then he arose like a cat, and clutching the savage by the throat, pressed his knife to the hilt in his body. There was a spasmodic quiver and struggle; then all was over.

"Thar! cuss you!" exclaimed Seth, "I wish I could serve you all like that."

Seizing the body, he carried it a short distance, then threw it down between two rocks, and covered it with stones, so as to conceal it from what others were roaming in the neighborhood. He then proceeded as cautiously back to the cavern, and, in answer to the inquiries, stated that he had seen nothing alarming. But when Viola was sleeping, he told the others the whole circumstance.

CHAPTER XV.

HOT QUARTERS AND SMOKE.

In the morning following, a long and earnest consultation was held. As usual, the opinion and will of Vic were the law of the rest. He stated that none need expect Sam to leave until he had searched every spot likely to contain them; that is, every spot likely to contain them in that section. He was now exploring the valley, and in the course of the day either he or some of the savages would be above. The only way to escape discovery was by strat-

agem. If they could effectually mislead them until night, they might change their hiding-place to some distant part of the mountain, and finally baffle him.

"But," said Vic, "it am the hardest thing fur me ter sneak 'round tryin' to keep out the way o' that cuss and his redskins. Wagh! I'm itchin' ter hev some fun."

"So'm I," added Wandaught, "but in course we've got ter keep kinder low 'long as thar's somebody else in the matter."

Vic said, "In course," and then proceeded, "Two or threc of us must git out o' here soon an' make tracks in some other parts up above, so as to make them b'lieve we ain't down in these parts, and ef they don't find this place by night, we'll give 'em the slip."

"I'll be darned if we won't!" exclaimed Seth, excitedly.

"Vic, yer allers war some on plannin'," said Wandaught, admiringly, "an' I ain't afeard but what we'll git out all squar' with our little one."

"Well, who is going with you, Vic?" asked Seth.

After a short conversation, it was decided that Wandaught and Seth should accompany him, while Summerfield should remain with Viola. They expected to return before there was any probability of their retreat being discovered. But, even should the savages come upon it in their absence, there was little cause to fear. It will be remembered that only one could enter at a time, and one person with a rusty rifle might effectually dispute the passage of a hundred or a thousand.

This decided upon, the three, with many warnings from and promises to Viola, made their way from the cavern, and began cautiously ascending the mountain. Summerfield and Viola followed them out and watched their movements until they were lost to view among the wild regions above them. Summerfield then re-entered the cave and made preparations for resistance in case an attack should be made before the rest should return. In a few minutes Viola came in and seated herself upon her accustomed seat, and watched his movements.

"What does that mean?" she asked, as he carried one of the bundles of furs and deposited it a number of feet nearer the entrance.

"Can you not comprehend, dearest?" he returned, with a smile.

"Yes; I suppose you intend it as a means of defence. But do you think we shall be discovered?"

"No; but such a thing might occur, and, of course, we should be prepared for any emergency. I do not think the others will be absent long, and there is hardly a shadow of probability that there will be any savages from the valley below before they return."

"George," said she, after a moment's deep thought, "I don't know how it is, but I have not felt easy since I have known that Redzel was pursuing us. I have heard it said that persons are sometimes given a shadowy apprehension of what is about to transpire. I do not believe in presentiments that I often hear spoken of; but if there is such a thing as a presentiment, I have had one for the last day or two."

"A presentiment of what?"

"Of the death of—"

"Great heaven! what is that?"

At that instant, with fearful distinctness, came the sharp crack of half a dozen rifles, accompanied by a number of wild whoops of agony and of defiance. They were distant, and yet the stillness of the region rendered them as audible as if but a few rods away.

For a few seconds, they remained as motionless as two statues; once they heard the discharge of a single gun, and now and then could distinguish several faint shouts. Again they heard a number of yells repeated, and in a moment there was the hurried tramp of some one approaching at a rapid rate. Summerfield cocked his rifle and bent his eye to the narrow entrance of daylight. The tramp continued, and in a moment he saw the twisted members of Seth suddenly halt before it. Then the cave was darkened, as he wedged his body rapidly in.

"Quick, George, for God's sake! there's forty after me, and Sam's among 'em," he exclaimed, plunging in.

Summerfield rolled the bundle of furs farther ahead, and rested his rifle on it.

"Good!" said Seth, "they'll be here in a minute."

"Where's Jim and Vic?"

"Don't know; guess they're kickin' round. We all three run into a nest of 'em 'fore we knowed it. I seen Jim jump square over one of 'em and go down a place a hundred feet deep. Lord a'mighty! I seen stars, too!"

"Did they pursue you?"

"Yes, yes; here's the devils now! Look."

A number of moccasined feet and naked legs could now be seen flitting before the entrance, and a triumphant shout of exultation told the savage joy of those outside.

"Shan't I crack some of them legs?" asked Seth, placing his finger on the trigger.

"No; don't crack anything but a head, and you'll have enough of them too."

At this moment one of the forms stooped and the horrid face of Sam Redzel was visible.

"Hallo, in thar!" he bawled.

"Helloah! back agin. How you like it?"

"That you, Crooked Legs?"

"It's the feller that walloped you most thunderingly once."

"And what's goin' to get sizzled, cuss yer liver. Hallo, Summerfield, you thar too?"

"I am here, Sam Redzel, as you will probably find."

"And me too," added Summerfield, imitating the voice of Vannoven.

"Bah!" laughed Redzel, "you can't come that, ole hoss. Vic Vannoven and Jim Wandaught 'll never cross my path agin."

"And you can't come that, ole woman fighter," retorted Seth. "Vic and Jim are kicken, I guess you'll find."

Seth sighted his rifle and took aim at the face of Redzel. Summerfield saw the movement, and drew back for him to fire; but just as the finger pressed the trigger, and while Redzel was giving utterance to an insulting command, he placed his hand beneath the hammer.

"George Summerfield," continued Seth, as he dropped his gun and gazed in his eyes, "you hindered me from killing that devil, just now. *Don't ever try it again. If you do, I will shoot you as sure as there is a God in heaven!*"

"Seth, what's the matter?"

"*Don't do it again; that's all!*" and he calmly resumed his gun and raised the hammer again.

At that instant a warrior's body was visible at the entrance. Seth fired, and a howl that made their ears tingle with horror, told his fate. As his companions stooped to draw him away, Seth jerked Summerfield's rifle from his hand and killed another Indian.

The yells of rage that followed the death of these two Indians were absolutely deafening. The bodies were withdrawn in a moment, and when the clamor had abated Seth called out:

"Sam Redzel, I shot them two. I thought the first one might be you, but it wasn't; you are very careful to keep your precious hide out of existence. Why don't you show yourself?"

"Bah! you think I'm a fool, don't you?"

"Of course. I've always had that opinion since I licked you so easy."

At this instant, there was the discharge of a number of rifles, and their bullets rattled harmlessly against the sides of the cavern.

"Try again," called out Seth, "you might hit the rocks again."

At that moment they heard the discharge of two pieces, apparently at some distance. This was followed by an excited conversation among those upon the outside.

"By thunder and lightning, but especially the lightning!" exclaimed Seth, joyously, looking round to Viola, "if that ain't Jim and Vic, then I'm a sinner, sure."

"Whoop!" he yelled, "thought Jim and Vic wouldn't cross your path any more. How do you like the fun, old prison bird?"

There was no reply, but he rapid mumbling and the hum of voices continued. In a moment they heard the treading of departing feet.

"What does that mean?" asked Summerfield.

"They have sent off a lot to fight the boys, and the rest staid here to—"

"Hallo, in thar. Is Summerfield thar?"

"I am here. What have you to say?"

"Is 'pose yer got that gal thar? I want her."

"Well, get her, and you can have her."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Summerfield. Ef you gives up that gal and don't help Crooked Legs—coz me'n him have got ter settle an account—I'll let yer off and promise yer, yer shan't be hurt."

"Redzel, we will both defend her against

you as long as we are able, and I will assist Seth to shoot you at the first opportunity."

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Seth.

"Then look out," thundered Redzel, with a fearful oath. "We'll see how you like smoke."

There was a commotion among the assailants. Soon several commenced pushing brush and sticks into the entrance with poles, keeping their bodies concealed. Seth succeeded, however, in breaking the arms of a couple of savages, who unconsciously exposed them.

"What are they going to do?" asked Viola, in a whisper.

"Burn us out," returned Summerfield, with a smile. "That is, if they can," he added, as he pointed backward toward the outlet that had before saved three human beings.

"Seth," said Summerfield, as he witnessed these preparations, "it will assist us, I think, if we make Redzel believe that we are alarmed at the present turn of things, and have no thought of eluding him."

"Don't know but what it would. Good idea. You do the talking, as you'll be the most likely to touch that tender heart of his."

"Say, Sam!"

"Wal, what's up?"

"That's a mean trick, I think. If I couldn't dislodge a foe, I wouldn't burn him out."

"Bah! you wouldn't, eh? Wal, I would. Do you give up?"

"Of course not, and do not intend to either."

"Wal, smoke then. I give yer the choice I done a while ago. Ef yer ain't a mind to take it, why you kin take what you can't help."

While he was speaking, a savage stooped to light the fagots. As quick as thought he leaped to his feet and fell in the agonies of death. Seth had shot him through the neck. Another ventured more warily, but Summerfield caught a glimpse of him as he was in the very act of applying the torch, and sent a bullet through his abdomen. As the Indian disappeared from view, the dry twigs flared up into a blaze and ignited the rest. He had succeeded although it had cost him his life. In a few moments the whole entrance was in a blaze; but, contrary to the expectations of all, the smoke passed outward, not a particle entering the cave! This was unaccountable to Summerfield, who expected that some smoke, at least, would enter; but, as he felt a draft of air from behind, he turned and saw that Viola had displaced the stone that covered the outlet, and there was a constant rush of air inward. She smiled as she saw the expression of surprise upon his countenance, but neither spoke.

The Indians, not content with simply starting the fire at the entrance, were continually making efforts to push it farther inward; but this was a perilous task, as they were compelled to stand directly before the entrance, and either Summerfield or Seth would catch the outlines of their forms, and fire, and never miss. But their continued attempts were partially crowned with success, for quantities of the burning embers would yield to those in front and be pressed considerably backward. Still there was no immediate danger from this. Their respiration was free, and as yet they experienced no inconvenience from the heat.

"Seth, it won't do to make an attempt to leave here before night, will it?"

"Of course not. It wasn't far from night when I got chased in here. In two hours it will be as dark as a pocket. They will keep the fire going all night, until Sam concludes we are purty nigh used up, and then they will crawl in and haul us out like roasted potatoes. I hain't noticed where this hole comes out, but it can't be a great distance off, and I can tell you, George, you mustn't think you're half through the danger yet."

"Of course I don't; but I can't help feeling pretty joyous now and then, when I think of the discomfort that Sam will experience when he finds we are gone. No doubt," added Summerfield, with a look at the embers, "the nest will be warm but the bird will be flown."

Both watched the entrance incessantly. The slightest exposure of their savage foe was sure to result fatally to them. Thus over two hours, unconsciously to Summerfield in his excitement, passed away, and during that time seven Indians had fallen by the hands of Seth and himself.

"George," said he, turning suddenly toward him, "do you know it is as dark as pitch? We can talk about leaving now. Viola, see here a minute."

As she approached, he continued:

"These fellows will keep that fire going for two or three hours yet, and our chance of getting away is in these two or three hours. They, in all probability, have no idea of our eluding them by going out a back door, and all that is needed is caution and self-reliance. This underground passage opens a few yards distant, and near enough to be fatal to us if the slightest mistake is made. Before going, I think it best for one of us to examine the passage in order to be sure of the course to pursue. I will do it, I guess; and, George, keep blazing away while I am gone."

So saying, he let himself down the opening. He sank to his chin only, when stooping, commenced crawling on his knees.

In a few moments, the head of Seth rose to view.

"It's all right," said he anticipating their question. "It goes about thirty feet, all the way under rocks, and comes out behind one, where there isn't any chance of a savage being stationed. The way is clear, and all we have got to do is to be quick and silent. I will go first, you next, and let Viola follow. Let me see. We have everything we can take, have we not?"

"Yes; but Vic will have to lose his firs; but if I ever reach the States he shall receive their full value."

"That will make him madder than anything else, but it can't be helped. Are you all ready?"

Each signified consent, and he again stooped from view.

"Come on," came his faint and muffled voice, and Summerfield sprang down.

"Now, dear Viola," said he, "keep close to me, and be careful and hopeful."

With this he also disappeared, and in a second called for her to follow. She did so without any hesitation, and commenced groping through a dark damp and crumbling passage of earth and gravel.

In a few moments Summerfield asked her to pause. Then she heard a movement and again groped on. A few seconds after she was lifted to her feet, and found herself standing above ground. The chilly night air was blowing against her, and she could just discern the outlines of Summerfield and Seth, so deep was the darkness. A short distance off she could hear the voices of the savages, and above the black forms of the rocks could see the reddened glare of the flames that their enemies had kindled for their destruction.

"Here, George," said Seth, "take my hand. It won't do to get separated."

Summerfield did so, and in turn took Viola's, and the three commenced moving slowly and cautiously forward. Seth was a few feet in advance, and was obliged to feel every foot of his way. Once or twice he paused upon the very edge of some awful precipice that yawned at his feet, and, without speaking to the others, changed his direction so as to avoid it. Thus they moved along for nearly a half-hour, when Seth, whose powers of vision were sometimes wonderful, saw, but a few yards ahead, two forms rise apparently from out the very earth! He halted as quick as thought, and sank noiselessly to the earth, almost simultaneously with Summerfield and Viola. Without a word, the two unloosed their rifles, and held them on the cock, ready to be discharged at the first necessity. The forms continued to approach, when, suddenly, they halted almost upon them, and one spoke in an undertone:

"That you, boys?"

All three rose to their feet at these words, for it was Vic who had uttered them.

"Took us some time to find yer," remarked Wandaught.

"Why, how did you know we were here?" asked Viola, nearly overcome with wonder and joy.

"Why, my little one, didn't you spose we could see that ar light off yonder, and didn't you spose we know'd you'd crawl out the fust chance? We've been watchin' round ever sin dark for yer."

"But," said Summerfield, suddenly, "what can we do without horses? Our own animals are too close to the savages to obtain."

"They is, am they? Wal, I ruther guess not. Do you spose we're green?"

Summerfield did not understand fully what he meant, but, without saying anything more, he followed them. They proceeded more rapidly now, as the way was better known. A short distance travelled, and they reached a spot where stood their horses. All were there,

and seemed waiting impatiently for their riders.

"Well, if this doesn't beat all?" exclaimed Summerfield, in admiration.

"In course," remarked Vic to Viola, "we wan't goin' to come to look for yer till we'd got the hosses. So Jim, he sneaked up about dark and foted 'em off. We brought 'em out here, and then commenced lookin' fur ye. We thought we wouldn't come onto you when you's too close to the devils—the Engins—cause yer mought think we belonged to 'em too, and thus hurt our feelin's, and p'raps our hides, too. Jest let me boost you up."

In five minutes, every one was mounted and on their way. Vannoven took the lead, Wandaught was next, and was followed by Seth, while Summerfield and Viola came last. Thus they again resumed their homeward journey, and with it the perils and suffering that not even Vic or Wandaught anticipated.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLIGHT.

Two or three hours of rough and dangerous riding, their horses plunging and pitching over rocks, gullies, and gorges, brought the fugitives to the base of the mountain. The night was still of an inky blackness, and the air cool and bracing. During the journey down the mountain, Vic and Wandaught, as might be expected, exchanged not a word. Seth now and then made some remark, yet the occasion, although far different, so forcibly reminded him of a previous one, that he was less loquacious than usual. Besides, he had several galling wounds, which prevented too joyous a flow of spirits. Summerfield remained close to Viola, admonishing her when some unusual obstruction was in the path, and enlivening her with some cheering remark when the riding would permit.

Suddenly Vic and Wandaught halted. As the rest came up around them, the former spoke:

"We're now on perarie, and thar's good trampin'. We've got the best hosses of the devils—redskins, I mean—and I propose that we let 'em went."

"I second that motion, especially if this horse is willin'," said Seth. "He's been prancing as though he kinder itched to be off, and I itch too."

"Then I s'pose you've got the itch," retorted Wandaught.

"O no, not at all; I didn't mean that."

"My little one," said Vic, good-humoredly, "are you afraid to ride fast?"

"I can ride as fast as my animal can go."

"Good. All ready. Come on."

As he thus spoke, his horse broke into a gallop, as did also the others. Their beasts were magnificent ones, and chafed with anger under the restraint imposed upon them. Wandaught, with characteristic cunning and foresight, had selected the fleetest and most powerful of the number, and the easy canter upon the level prairie, in the bracing night air, only awoke the slumbering fire within their veins. It was almost impossible to curb them, and almost unconsciously, to the riders, their gallop was increased into nearly a run.

"Oh! this is delicious!" remarked Viola to Summerfield. "After being cramped for two or three days in that narrow cavern, it sends the thrill through one to fly over the ground like this."

"It is glorious," he added. "Doesn't it give you an overflow of spirits?"

"It does indeed. It seems I could ride for many hours thus."

"How does it affect that presentiment?" he asked, lowering his voice to a jesting undertone.

"Don't refer to that," she quickly returned, in a deep whisper.

Hour after hour they thus galloped forward over the level prairie. They were crossing the northern part of what is known as the Great American Desert. They might be said, in fact, to be in another country, so different was it from the region they had just left. The air they found continually growing warmer as they receded from the mountains, while the earth beneath them was dry and hardened, as though the sun had blazed uninterruptedly upon it for many a day. It was evident that the fierce storms of thunder, lightning, and rain, which they had experienced, although but a few miles distant, did not reach this section. The stunted

prairie grass brushed their horses' sides as they went through it, and now and then the suffocating dust arose from their hoofs.

Soon it began to grow light ahead of them, and rapidly increased until the sun appeared, and the day was upon them. Vic and Wandaught reined in, and in a few moments they all came to a halt.

"I rather ca'culate as how thar'll be some tall swearin' in a little while up that way," said Wandaught, jerking his hand back of them.

"Wouldn't I like to hear that feller when he crawls in and finds there ain't nobody there, and when he don't find his horses, thunder, won't he rip and tear!" added Seth.

The exhilarating ride had had its effect upon all. Even Vic's eyes sparkled with genuine, healthy humor, and Summerfield felt disposed to be funnier than usual.

"How does this set on your stummick, my little one?" asked Vic, as he surveyed her glowing form with unfeigned admiration.

"O Vic! I am nearly crazy with pleasure. I never enjoyed such a ride. Doesn't it make your heart jump?"

"Yas; thar's an orful thumpin' in here when I think what a sweet little chicken we've got with us. Blastnation, Jim! did you ever see such a birdy?" asked Vic, turning with a happy grin toward him.

"No, sir; ef you and me war young, Vic and as purty as Sam Redzel, we mought make George step 'round."

This sally was greeted with a hearty laugh, in which Viola could not help joining. The crimson glow on her face deepened, and she made an effort to pout, but she could not resist the feeling that all experienced.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said she, glancing at Vic and Wandaught, and yet she admitted to herself that, next to Summerfield, their admiration would gratify her more than any other one she could imagine.

"Come," she continued, "let us go on."

"No; we'll stop a while to let our hosses rest," returned Vic, springing from his. At this they all dismounted, and, removing their saddles, let the horses crop the buffalo grass, that was quite luxuriant. Before Summerfield had turned his loose, Vic approached Viola's to unfasten the saddle for her. Unloosening the girth, he pulled it partly off, and then resting it on the side of the animal, turned his face and asked, in an undertone:

"Yer ain't mad at old Vic, am yer, my little one?"

"I don't know," she returned, shaking her head. "You mustn't talk so."

"Wal, blast it, you am a sweet, purty, little thing, an' I jest said so, kase it war so."

Viola really believed the rough but kindly trapper feared he had offended her. She approached closer to him, and placing her white hand upon his ponderous shoulder, gazed into his twinkling orbs as though she would read his very soul. She saw one or two of the others were noticing her, and Seth had made an excuse to pass near her in order to hear her words. But her voice was so low that it reached no ears but those she intended it should.

"Vic, I love you as though you were my father, and I know you will never offend me."

The hardy old trapper winced, and felt as uncomfortable as if a rifle-ball had struck him. Viola waited a moment, expecting him to speak, but seeing that some strong emotion was at work in him, she turned and approached the others.

The day had now so far advanced that the prairie was visible for many miles. Away the faint swells stretched as far as the eye could reach, and before them the horizon closed down upon the level prairie, as though it were the ocean. Behind them rose the gigantic chain of the Rocky Mountains, veiled in a thin, bluish haze, that softened their jagged outlines and wrapped them in a soft splendor. And many miles in the distance rose the sharp point called the Peak. Several clouds were floating near its summit, which made the top resemble a white cloud in the sky. There was a majestic grandeur in the whole scene, as much in the vast, undulating, and withered prairie as in the mighty chain of the mountains that extended for thousands of miles over the continent.

As the sun rose in the sky the air became milder and pleasant, so that Seth relinquished his idea of starting a fire. There was no food to cook, and none needed the warmth of it.

"We ort ter have a bite," said Vic, "for it never sets well to ride far without it. Howsmever, I could go far two or three months,

but I s'pose my little 'un ort to have sunkthin'."

"I can stand it, Mr. Vic, as long as you can," she returned, with spirit.

This made the hunter laugh again as though he would kill himself. He had admired her beauty and appearance before, and now he respected her spirit.

The men had seated themselves upon the ground, and Summerfield spread his blanket for Viola.

"There," said he, "rest yourself, for I suspect we shall have a long ride."

"I hope so," she returned. Then, turning her face toward Vic and Wandaught, said:

"Come, while we are idling away the time here, I want you to tell me about the trouble you had with Redzel's men."

"It wa'n't much," returned Vic, "but me'n Jim made bigger fools of ourselves than we ever did afore. We knowed thar war trouble 'bout, and yet, fur all that, we run our noses right into it. We orter bin blowed to blazes fur it. The fust thing I knowed I didn't know nothin' in pertic'lar, 'cept as how we'd walked squar into a thunderin' big nest of 'em. They rose right up 'mong us, and commenced crackin' away. I seen Jim throw a back spring and go over inter some place whar I knowed he war all right, and I smashed a couple of red devils' faces and got into cover with only two or three holes in my carcass. Crooked Pegs, thar, was gappin' long ahind us, and when he seed the trouble you orter seed him slide. Wal, then—wagh! wagh! wagh," and the trapper leaned his head back and laughed, while Seth looked at him as though he would like to annihilate him. A broad grin illuminated Wandaught's countenance also, and Summerfield and Viola could not resist smiling at the exquisite drollery of the scene.

"I never thort he could use his legs as he did then. The way he straddled over the ground would have scart a grizzly. I couldn't see nothin' else of 'im but his feet; but they saved 'im. There wa'n't one that could come nigh him, and so he got down to the Hole and give 'em the slip arter all."

As the speaker finished, he turned toward Seth, and, seeing his expression, burst into another fit of unrestrained laughter.

"I can't see what ther's to laugh at," said the latter, indignantly.

"Wal, we does," said Wandaught, joining them. "Why don't you laugh yourself?"

"Some folks don't know what manners is," remarked Seth, with a meaning emphasis, and looking off upon the prairie.

"And some chaps knows as what—"

"Darn! I think it's time we started," exclaimed the persecuted fellow, suddenly springing to his feet.

"So do I," added Summerfield, rising, more out of sympathy for Seth than anything else.

"And I have been thinking so ever since we halted," joined Viola.

After a few more indulgencies in laughter, the two trappers slowly arose and made preparations for starting. The horses had not wandered far, and in a few moments were brought up, re-saddled and mounted. The line of march was the same as before, with the exception that Wandaught rode four or five hundred yards in advance, for the purpose of keeping a lookout for danger. Seth and Vic rode side by side, just ahead of Viola and Summerfield, who kept up a continual conversation.

The travellers continued uninterruptedly upon their journey until nearly noon. The horses were kept upon a rapid, easy walk, as it was necessary to preserve their strength for any contingency that might arise.

All at once, Summerfield, while replying to a remark of Viola's, saw Wandaught suddenly halt and raise his hand above his head.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"Something is wrong, I fear."

Vic and Seth had reined up their animals, and the four stood waiting the movements of Wandaught.

"What is the matter?" asked Viola of Vic.

"Jim sees sunkthin', and is waitin' till he knows what it mought be."

The four now sat and gazed silently upon Wandaught, who, for full ten minutes, did not make a movement. Then he rose to his feet, and standing upon the back of his animal, gazed a moment ahead. Then he reseeded himself, and turning his head motioned for the others to come up.

"Sign?" asked Vic.

"Engin."

This was all unintelligible to Viola, but the rest understood it, and Summerfield explained it to her. There were Indians on their track.

They now started slowly forward. After a while Wandaught stated that the party approaching did not number over half-a-dozen, and was no war party. In a short time, Viola could see them nearing her, in their picturesque costumes. They appeared to fear no harm, and approached with such an air of confidence and security as to disarm all suspicion of evil intention upon their part. In explanation of this, Vic replied they belonged to a friendly tribe.

"What tribe?" asked Summerfield.

"The Sioux."

"What are the Sioux doing in this section?" queried Summerfield.

"They often tote around here after bufflers, and to git sight of things. Hello, Jim's gabbin' with 'em."

The savages had come up, and were now holding a conversation with Wandaught. In a moment the two parties were together. The Indians had halted, hoping to effect a barter with the whites. Summerfield saw that they had a quantity of buffalo meat, and with a few trifles he purchased sufficient to make a good meal for all their party.

As there was nothing to detain them longer, the party set forward again. Viola suffered considerably from thirst during the day, as the water in the American Desert is exceedingly scarce. In truth, in some places the stranger would perish from thirst. Quite a number of streams, however, cross the upper part of it, and none of the company really experienced any danger on account of it.

About noon they reached a narrow stream that had once been a river. Its banks were white, and the sun had cut them into great curling cakes of mud. A short distance down, they came upon myriads of tracks of horses, showing that a drove of them had quenched their thirst at this small stream. The water was fresh. In many places the tiny springs bubbled up through the silver sand, imparting a delicious coldness to it.

Choosing a suitable place, the party dismounted and made preparations for quite a lengthy halt. Wandaught started a fire from the buffalo grass and a few dried sticks that lay scattered along the stream, brought down a long time before, when its volume had been swollen to a torrent. With these, after considerable difficulty, he succeeded in cooking the meal that Summerfield had purchased of the Sioux. A good, substantial dinner followed. While eating, all kept up a running conversation except Vic, who appeared sullen and displeased at something that had occurred. This grew so marked at length, that Viola approached him, when he was sitting apart by himself, and asked him his trouble. At first he refused to answer, but, being pressed, replied loud enough for all to hear.

"I've bin thinkin' as how them skins hev all gone to the devil—"

"Don't talk that way, Vic."

"Wal, gone to—gone then. 'Nuther tramp's good for nuthin'."

Summerfield approached him with a smile.

"What was the value of all your furs, Vic?"

"Kit Cheatum promised me two or three hundred dollars for 'em if I'd take 'em to West-port for him."

"Will you sell them to me?"

"Sell 'em to you?" repeated the trapper, staring at him as though he thought he had lost his senses.

"Yes; sell them to me, I mean. I want to buy them."

"See here, ole coon, ef you want to pick a muss, I'm ready fur ye," said Vic, rising to his feet and approaching Summerfield.

"Why, what's the matter, Vic? Can't you make a bargain? I want to buy your furs, that is all." Summerfield, seeing that he had better explain himself, continued: "See here, my old friend, you and Wandaught have made every exertion in your power to save my life and that of Viola. Whether you succeed further matters not. I have already incurred a debt which I never expect to repay; and, as a moiety of the payment, as a slight token of the gratitude I feel for you, I shall place five hundred dollars into your hands as soon as I can communicate with home, upon our arrival in Independence."

"No, you don't; you can't come that, it would be stealin'," returned Vic, resolutely shaking his head.

"Stealin'!" exclaimed Summerfield. "Why,

I took your furs and let the Indians shoot into them until they were riddled and completely ruined, and now, because I offer to pay for what I did, you call it stealing. O Vic!"

"Of course," joined in Viola, "you ought to receive payment for them."

"Sartin, Vic, you're kinder green," added Wandaught.

Still the honest trapper suspected the truth—that he was only making it as a screen to an act which his heart prompted. He continued shaking his head.

"Just let me get an idea into that thundering old head," said Seth, stepping forward. He spread his feet apart, and raising the broad palm of his left hand before him, and dropping the index finger of his right hand into it, commenced:

"You see," here the speaker frowned learnedly, and raised and let his finger fall upon his palm to give more emphasis to his words, "you see here's the point—"

"What, that ar a pint?" interrupted Vic, pointing to Seth's monstrous finger.

"Wait a minute," said Seth, as the others laughed, "wait a minute. You see, this is the way of it. You got some furs (a fall of the finger); these furs you put in a cave (another fall of the finger); you went away and left them there (fall of the finger); you get into a muss with Engins (fall of the finger); steal their horses (fall of the finger); therefore, I say George owes you just five hundred dollars" (a triumphant flourish and fall of the finger at the last sentence).

"That so?" asked the hunter of himself, scratching his head and thoroughly puzzled at the explanation.

"Of course, it's so. Plain as day. You see you just got the furs (here the hands dropped, and the speaker commenced going over the grounds rapidly), got into a muss with the Engins; therefore, Summerfield owes you five hundred dollars."

"That's the fact," returned the hunter, ashamed to appear ignorant.

"And as Summerfield was present," continued Seth, "when they were destroyed, you, therefore, owe me two hundred dollars."

Vic raised his head and foot at this, and gave Seth a tremendous kick, saying:

"Thar 'tis, then!"

This put the whole party into the best of spirits. Vannoven agreed to accept the sum offered, and Summerfield promised Wandaught as liberal a remuneration.

As the stream afforded a good camping ground, it was decided to remain in their present position until morning. Accordingly preparations were made for spending the night, and, keeping a good look out, they seated themselves upon the earth in sociable conversation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BURNING PRAIRIE.

SHORTLY after this it was concluded best to turn in for the night. Wandaught agreed to perform the duty of sentinel, and, taking his rifle, he passed a short distance, so as to be beyond the light of the fire. Vannoven rolled himself in his blanket, like a huge turtle in his shell, and in a few minutes was unconscious to outer things. Summerfield, at Vic's request, lay with his back to his, in order to preserve the warmth of their bodies, and in this position, with the exception of Seth and Wandaught, the company were soon sound asleep.

Summerfield was roused from a sound refreshing sleep by feeling Seth's elbow thrust several times rather forcibly in his back.

"What you at?" he demanded, irritated at being thus disturbed.

"Say, George, I want to ask you something."

"Well, if you want to keep your head whole, don't speak to me again."

"Well, that's a darned fine way to talk, I should think," indignantly retorted Seth, poking his head from under the blanket, and glaring at the swell where Summerfield lay. "Keep your feet on your own side," he added, giving one a kick. Then, as he sunk back again, continued:

"Some folks are mighty particular how others speak to them, but like to talk to themselves. I am always willing to hear what has got to be said, for my part."

At this point Summerfield dropped to sleep, which lasted five minutes, possibly six, when there was a flounder from Seth that startled

him as though a buffalo had fallen upon him.

"S'pose you are mad at that movement, ain't you?" said Seth, as he felt Summerfield moving. The latter, finding that no sleep could be gained thus, arose, and, smothering his wrath, passed to the other side of the fire, where, in twenty minutes, he was sound asleep again, despite the philosophizing of his companion.

A half hour, he again felt some one touch him, and started up, determined to compel Seth to cease disturbing him; but instead of encountering him, he saw Wandaught leaning over him.

"Come, it's time to git up."

"Is it morning? I suppose so. That confounded fellow has spoiled this night's rest."

"No, 'taint mornin', but it's just the same."

"What's the matter?"

Wandaught pointed toward the west.

Summerfield looked in that direction, and saw the horizon lighted up for a long distance, as though the sun were rising. This he knew could not be a fact, as it was there he had seen it sink upon the day before. Still he did not understand the cause.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

Wandaught made no reply, but snuffed the air, which was strongly tainted.

"Is the prairie on fire?" asked Summerfield, springing to his feet.

"That's it. You've got it at last."

At this point, Seth approached, and in a moment there was a movement of Vannoven's bundle, and he crept forth. He walked slowly up to the others, keeping his face turned toward the light, which was growing stronger every moment.

"I've smelt that ever sin' noon," said he, "but I didn't think Sam Redzel war such a fool to burn the prairie when he found we war on it, though I s'pose he felt mad 'nough when he knowd we'd gone off with the best of his hosses."

"Why, is that his work?" questioned Summerfield in astonishment.

"In course, don't you know nothin'?"

"How soon will it be here?"

"Couple of hours."

"Well, I should think it near time some provision were made against it."

"So sh'd I. Jim, s'pose we 'fire'?"

By "fire" he meant setting fire to the grass around them—a precaution that all understood, and one which, as our readers are aware, is invariably adopted at such times. The two trappers approached the smouldering fire, and seizing a brand, each went a few feet east of the lodge where Viola lay, and twisting several bunches of the grass into compact masses, stooped and blew them into a blaze. This communicated readily with the rest, and in a few minutes there was a broad wave of flame expanding, cracking and flying with the wind from them. During this proceeding, Seth had secured the horses, which exhibited some signs of making a stampede, and Summerfield called Viola. At first she felt some natural alarm at the unusual aspect of the heavens, but soon understood that there was no personal danger.

There is a terrific sublimity in a burning prairie. The tumultuous ocean of fire and flame that surges forward like a tornado, outstripping the fleetest race-horse; the pointed spears of fire that twist and twirl in dazzling gyrations; the unearthly reflection and glare upon the clouds above; the infuriated tramp and bellowing of the buffaloes; the thundering tread of the snorting horses; the hissings and writhings of the scorching serpents, and the sharp crackling and roaring of the fire itself; all these are fearful exhibitions of some tremendous Power, and are scenes which no pen can describe.

The fugitives rode close in the blackened track of the fire they had kindled. The grass was so thin and dry that the flames merely flashed over them; yet the ground was heated, and in many places there were little twists of flame that snapped and crackled, and the horses would sometimes leap with pain as they trod upon a burning twig or root. Once or twice enormous snakes were seen, half burned in two, and lashing the ground in agony; and the situation of the fugitives at least was a strange one—riding as they were, between two mighty volumes of fire.

When they had gone about half a mile, they halted, determined to wait till the morning. As they turned their faces backward, they saw that the fire was less than a mile distant. There was, if possible, a more awful sublimity

in its appearance. The revolving spouts of smoke and flame could be plainly seen, and overhead were millions of sparks and cinders that seemed to shoot upward, and when their force was spent, slowly float in mid-air. The unusual disturbance of the atmosphere had created a strong wind, which at times would force part of the flames to the earth and hold them still a moment, and raise them up and drive them like chaff before it.

All had wheeled their animals round, and stood facing the approaching element, like wild beasts at bay. Not a word was spoken, so complete was the spell that bound each tongue. Once Summerfield turned toward Viola, whose animal stood beside his. The lurid reflection of the powerful light lit up her countenance with an unearthly and almost ghastly brightness. Her bosom was swelling and heaving with excitement, and through her thin, parted lips he thought he could hear the fevered breath come and go. Her dark eyes were flashing, and as the wind lifted her floating tresses from her shoulders, there was, indeed, a wild sublimity in her loveliness. The horse with his arched neck, dilated nostrils, and glaring eyes, harmonized well with his rider.

As Summerfield was gazing at her in rapt admiration, his ear detected a noise resembling the distant roll of thunder. He listened intently, thinking perhaps it might be the fire, but the sound was so different, he was soon satisfied that it was not; and although it might be mistaken for thunder, yet it had a different sound. There was a peculiar, indescribable noise that might be compared to a trembling wave of thunder, and which, at last, Summerfield was convinced was the tramping of myriads of feet upon the prairie. He turned to Vic and Wandaught, but saw that they had noticed it, and were conversing about it.

"What is that?" he asked of the former.

"A drove of bufflers," he replied.

"Will they not trample us to death?"

"Praps so."

With this consolatory remark, the two trappers dismounted, calling on Seth to see that their horses were restrained from fleeing in their absence. They then gathered a number of burning twigs and sticks together, and blew them into a bright blaze. When this was finished the thundering clatter of crackling hoofs upon the prairie had grown rapidly louder and nearer, until all knew that they were comparatively close at hand. The trappers waited a moment, and then, when they could discern the dark forms, fired into them, then seized several brands of fire and hurled them toward the approaching bodies. Onward they came, not checked in the least, but the stratagem of the hunters had saved the lives of the fugitives. At the point where the buffalo had fallen (for it could not have been otherwise) the herd divided into two great diverging bodies. These plunged on as irresistibly as before, but left the spot in which our friends were standing perfectly open and safe.

It was a strange sight—this herd of a hundred thousand buffaloes plunging past them. On each side, before and behind, they surged forward like a vast sea, their ponderous heads and backs pressed close together, and sinking and rising like the heaving water. Their hoofs gave forth a peculiar, crackling noise, like the rapid discharge of musketry, save that it was fainter and more continuous. Their long, pointed horns resembled the presented spears of an army, and their tails lashed the air as though in torment. Now and then a sharp bellow would tell of some unfortunate one gored and trampled to death in an instant, and at intervals a huge body would be forced above the others, or would leap up and in a moment fall back and mingle again with the dark sea of bodies.

Thus, for an hour, swept this mighty herd along. The dust from their hoofs was nearly suffocating, and dimmed the glare of the fire so much at times that it was scarcely visible. When they had finally disappeared, the trappers remounted their animals, and the company moved slowly forward in their track. Behind them, the fire had spent its force, and was now visible far ahead and upon each hand, but was raging more fiercely toward the south. Vannoven informed them that this conflagration had not extended over much surface, and would travel but a short distance farther. This section being rarely visited by storms, was peculiarly liable to be overrun with fire. The grass, although stunted and sparse, was always dry, and burned readily; yet, as has been shown, a fire originating here was not likely to

extend to a very great distance, but was merely a local one.

The fugitives had gone some two or three miles, when they saw that morning had dawned. A halt was made, and they breakfasted upon a portion of the buffalo that still remained.

Ever since the flight of the buffaloes, Seth's horse had manifested an uneasiness and terror that rendered him almost unmanageable. Seth coaxed and railed him, but as it did no good, began to fear the consequences.

"Whoa, darn you!" he ejaculated, giving him a yank that threw him upon his haunches.

"What's the use acting this way? 'Twon't do you no good," he commenced, in a persuasive tone, as the animal grew more docile, and began prancing gayly around.

"That's a nice horse. Whoa! whoa! nice horse," and he patted the animal kindly upon the neck. Perhaps the beast had discovered for the first time that he was not carrying his Indian rider, and he was determined at all events that the one upon his back should be dislodged.

"Skin me, ef he ain't scart," remarked Wandaught, contemptuously.

"Who's scart? Whoa, nice horse. WHOA!" he exclaimed, as the animal commenced whirling around like a top. Summerfield sprang to the earth and caught his head, or there is no telling what would have been the result.

"By thunder! ef I don't kill that darned infernal thing!" exclaimed Seth, furiously, springing to the earth, and holding him by the bridle. Then, gathering his strength, he made a maddened kick at the animal, which wheeled around at that instant, as he divined his intention. The consequence was, the whole force of the kick was lost in air, and, instead of being spent upon the horse, it lifted Seth from his other foot and let him drop upon his back. Summerfield sprang and caught the animal again, or he would have escaped. Seth's discomfiture was greeted with a hearty laugh, which enraged him only the more; and, as he arose, he commenced clawing blindly around in search of something with which to strike the horse; but nothing, save a long, charred stick, rewarded him. This, however, he clutched eagerly, and running up, struck such a blow that it broke in his hand, and the horse escaped him again.

"Go, then, ye blasted, bloated skinflint, low, greasy beast, I mean!" and with this, he threw the cudgel against the flying beast. In vain Vic uttered his horse-call whistle; the infuriated animal sped away over the plains, and, ere long his form was lost in the distance.

"Now yer in a pretty fix, Crooked Pegs!" exclaimed Vic. "What are to become on ye, fur as sure as shootin' Sam Redzel 'ill be down hyer in less nor two hours. You'll have to settle accounts, then, sure."

"I kin whip Sam Redzel any day. Jist let him come on!" shouted Seth, fairly beside himself with fury, as his long arms beat the air. "I kin lick the whole on ye. Jist jump hyer if ye wants accounts squared!" and Seth began to "peel." This was too much for the company. They laughed until tears stood in their eyes. Seth spreading his legs wide apart like two long braces to an old house, thrust his hands into his pockets and scowled furiously. Even Viola was convulsed, but she too strongly commiserated his case to refrain from condolence. Approaching him she laid her hand on his shoulder, looking full in his face. Soon the thunder-cloud began to dissipate, and ere Vic and Wandaught had recovered their equanimity, Seth's face was like a full round sun of smiles.

Thus good humor was restored, although there was no forgetting that Seth was in a bad predicament.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PURSUIT, AND AT BAY.

ALTHOUGH Seth had been deprived of his animal, the party determined that no time should be lost in plodding upon the way, as heretofore; and, instead of adhering to the general wish to tarry there for the night, Vic informed them that they should not halt again until dark. They spent no more than fifteen minutes in eating their meal, and Seth mounting behind Summerfield, they struck their horses into a brisk gallop. Seth would ride about an hour with each, and thus they succeeded in get-

ting over ground about as rapidly as though he possessed a horse of his own.

The prairie passed over in the afternoon was mostly of the rolling kind, and was much better watered than the portion over which the fire had raged. In some places it was well timbered, and resembled another country, which, in fact, was the case, for they had passed the confines of the Great American Desert, and were again upon the billowy, fertile prairie.

The company continued moving forward, and, as Vic had declared was his intention, did not draw rein until it was dark around. They then halted upon a small stream, fringed by a number of cottonwoods, and in a short time Viola's rude tent was erected, as it had been the night before. After partaking of the evening meal, she retired, and Summerfield, Seth and Wandaught stretched themselves before the crackling fire; Vannoven remained on duty as sentinel much of the night. Seth strove to engage Wandaught in conversation, but he was more reserved than usual, and in a short time the three wrapped their blankets around them and sunk to sleep.

Vannoven had strong suspicion that his company would be visited before morning, and, instead of remaining in one position, he continued walking around the camp at intervals all night, on the alert, for the slightest sign of danger. But the company were undisturbed, and at an early hour they arose refreshed, and made hasty preparations for resuming their journey.

There was a sudden and unexpected change in the weather during the forenoon of this day. The air was still tainted with a smoky smell, and the conflagration of the prairie had created a great disturbance in the atmosphere. There were short but strong gusts of wind at intervals, and a sudden turn to cold that was wonderful. In two hours it was as if they had passed from a tropical into a frigid climate, and, to make the change more wonderful still, a snow-storm commenced at noon! Huge flakes were blown almost horizontally against the travellers, and were whirled around their heads until they were perfectly blinded in the white mist. In twenty minutes more, not a particle of snow was in the air, and hardly a flake visible upon the ground. Seth concluded that "things had got out of order; shouldn't wonder if that blasted boss was the cause of it all."

After the cessation of the snow-squall, the air seemed to possess an unwonted brilliancy, and objects could be seen at nearly double the distance they could before. As the fugitives were now in dangerous territory, Vic rode quite a distance ahead, while Wandaught, possessing a keener vision, remained about the same distance behind!

They had not journeyed over a mile thus, when Wandaught suddenly rode up among them.

"Danger?" asked Summerfield.

"Yas, sir, thar is! Thar's a lot of redskins follerin' us!"

Vic, who had also returned among them, exchanged a meaning glance with the speaker at these words. Every one was silent a few seconds, when Wandaught said:

"Thar's no use of hiding the matter, boys. Sam Redzel and his whole pack have been after us ever sin' we left the mountains, and they're in sight now!"

All turned their eyes instinctively at these words, and sure enough, far behind them could be discerned a number of moving specks in the distance. Had a shot struck Viola, she could not have been more startled than she was at this intelligence. She had ceased entirely to fear Redzel, and this sudden consciousness that at this moment he was so near, was almost a revulsion from hope to despair. A short consultation or council of war was held. Had Seth his horse they would have feared nothing; as it was, the course decided upon was to run at all events. This determined, Seth mounted behind Wandaught, and the fugitives struck their horses into a full gallop over the prairie. Now commenced a run for life.

From the very commencement it was evident that the pursuers had the advantage. All were well mounted upon equally good horses, while the additional weight of Seth embarrassed the progress of the fugitives. He changed from one to another, until, as a last resort, Summerfield gave up his horse to him, and mounted Viola's, holding her in front of him.

"What will be the end of this?" asked she, as she felt Summerfield's arm pass around her

quivering form and drew her fervently to him. "Heaven only knows. They gain upon us at each mile, and sooner or later we must fight."

They conversed together, and at intervals Summerfield would glance behind him, and every time he did this he was compelled to admit that the pursuers were gaining at a rate that was fearfully certain and rapid.

"That's our only chance, boys!" called on Vic, pointing in a southeast direction.

As Summerfield turned his eyes in that direction, he saw, several miles distant, a huge, dark rock, that some freak of nature had raised seemingly out of the prairie itself. It was of great size, very irregular in its outline, broad at the base, perfectly perpendicular upon one side, while upon the other it was inclined like a very steep plain. It was one of those strange refuges that are found in some parts of the Far West. Upon the prairie, many miles from the slightest elevation, these piles of rock are found, whose construction is a source of wonderment to the curious. Some of them are so admirably adapted for defence as to compel the belief that they were erected at some remote period for that purpose. What is equally strange, is that they are often found in sections where the slightest pebble is unknown for miles.

It may appear improbable that the refuge in question should be discovered at the precise moment it was needed, but it was not chance that brought them upon it. Both trappers knew of its existence, and had shaped their course in the morning so as to pass it. They well knew its value.

As Vic spoke, Summerfield comprehended his meaning, and said to Viola:

"That is fortunate, certainly. We can make a stand upon that rock against an army."

At this instant they heard the faint shout of their pursuers.

"I fear nothing," he added, "we can annihilate the whole company from that standpoint."

Viola made no reply, for her heart was too full for any.

When within a couple of miles of the rock, Seth's horse suddenly stumbled, throwing him several yards over his head. He was not injured much, and turned to remount his animal. But he was still down, and in spite of his utmost efforts, could not be made to regain his feet. Summerfield called to Seth to hurry, as every second was precious. He still endeavored to raise him, but finding it utterly useless, turned, and striking into his own canter, was soon up to the others.

And thus they continued their flight. The pursuers saw their misfortune, and divined their intention in hastening toward the rock, and strained to the utmost to overtake them before it could be accomplished. Seth ran as he never ran before, and the others rode as they never rode before. Redzel's exulting shouts could be heard, and several shots were sent from his company.

At last the fugitives thundered their panting horses up to the rock.

"Jump, and up with you!" exclaimed Vic, springing from his horse, and, with characteristic foresight, carrying the buffalo meat with him. Summerfield grasped Viola's half-fainting form, and, with almost superhuman strength, bounded up the steep face of the rock, followed by the panting Seth. Vic was directly behind them, and Wandaught came leisurely up in the rear. As they reached the top, a score of bullets rattled off splinters of rocks around them, yet fortunately touched none. The rock was surmounted by a perfectly horizontal cap, circular in form, and about thirty feet in diameter. Around the edge of this were piled a number of stones, open only on the side by which the fugitives had reached it.

On dashed Redzel with nearly forty shrieking savages. They intended to follow the fugitives and capture them by absolute force, and made an impetuous rush up the steep; but the rapid, deadly discharge of the rifles from above told too fearfully upon them. The foremost were shot through and rolled like logs, in their agony, to the ground. Several, with insane frenzy, made their way to the top, and there met their fate. Seth clove the head of one nearly in twain with his clubbed rifle, while Vic, concentrating the terrible strength of his frame into his arm, struck a savage a blow that cracked his skull like a cannon shot, and sent him spinning full a dozen feet through the air. Wandaught caught another, and, with a light-

ning-like movement, run his knife to the hilt in his body, and then grasping him around the waist, sent him headlong to the ground. There was but one avenue of approach, there was but one vulnerable point, which was now invulnerable, and the savages could stand this terrific resistance but a short time. Breaking in complete bewilderment, they fled wildly back, and at a few hundred yards distance gathered together to hold a consultation over the best means of dislodging the fugitives and avenging the death of their comrades.

"Whoop!" shouted Vic, giving way to his feelings, "that ar's the tallest kind o' fun."

"Pity they stopped so soon," added Wandaught, complacently wiping his brow.

"There was some excitement in that, I allow," said Seth, as he seated himself near the latter.

"I guess they were taught one lesson not to be forgotten very soon," said Summerfield. "I imagine they will consider somewhat before they make another such a rush. But where was Redzel all this time? I saw nothing of him."

"He took precious care of his old hide," replied Seth. "I saw him standing at the bottom, yelling like all fury for the others to go up, but was very careful not to attempt it himself."

"It's qu'ar he can't be knocked over. I move that we pick him off the next chance we git, and then we'll be done with his botherin'."

"My sentiments exactly. It ought to been done long ago."

"Look at them," said Summerfield. "They are hatching some new scheme, I warrant."

The trappers kept an open eye upon the movements of Redzel, and were ready for any manifestation upon his part. Summerfield seated himself beside Viola and conversed cheerfully with her, assuring her that there was no probability of the Indians making a successful attack.

It was now quite late in the afternoon. The weather seemed to grow colder again, and the savages made preparations for encamping upon the ground. The horses, which the fugitives had left at the base of the rock, had been captured, and of course they retained their own, so that they had little fear of an escape being attempted before morning.

Vic had a quantity of the buffalo meat cooked, as was his invariable custom, and of this they partook sparingly. Viola retained her portion without tasting it. She knew not how soon they would suffer for it. Water could not be obtained, and this simple fact occasioned more alarm than did all the others combined.

Gradually the night closed around them; the savages lighted their watch-fires at different points, so as to surround the fugitives. Although the weather through the day had been singularly variable, and the heavens were full of straggling clouds, yet a moon arose late in the evening, and the prairie was bathed at intervals in its full flood of light.

Four fires were blazing at as many points around the rock, at a considerable distance, and about these could be discerned the shadowy forms of the savages stretched upon the earth, or passing between them. Once or twice Vic and Wandaught succeeded in picking one of these off; but the distance was too great and the aim too uncertain to spend many shots in the attempt, and they contented themselves with merely keeping a watch to prevent an approach. Each trapper, with Seth and Summerfield, took it upon himself to watch one of the fires through the night.

"Here, boys, what does this mean?" suddenly asked Seth, in a suppressed voice, turning around and pointing out upon the prairie. Wandaught approached, and peered cautiously over a moment, then stepping back, said, in a low, but joyful whisper:

"That's three or four sneakin' up to git them carcasses down thar. Let's wait till they git close, and then blaze into 'em."

Several dark forms could be seen stealthily, silently, and slowly approaching the rock. Wandaught remained in an immovable position, gazing upon them with as much zest as would a hunter upon his prey.

"Now, boys!" said he, in a husky, almost inaudible whisper.

All sprang noiselessly to his side, and as silently sighted their rifles. Then there was a simultaneous crack. A wild, deathly howl of agony pierced the air and rolled far over the prairie. Several forms could be seen clutching the earth in their death struggles. Four In-

dians were stretched full length upon the ground. One lay flat upon his back, his limbs extended in the rigidity of death; another, upon his side, with his arm beneath his head, as though he were quietly sleeping, while a third was doubled up like a twisted knot. All were dead.

That was a night never to be forgotten by the fugitives. Not one slept. Viola, although she feigned sleep, did not close an eye. Now and then they would exchange a word or two in an undertone, that rendered the silence only the more oppressive, and once in a while, perhaps, Summerfield and Seth would change their positions for a few seconds. Several times the former approached Viola, and gazed down into her sweet face with a look of tenderness, mingled with pity that so frail and beautiful a being should be doomed to such tortures, both of body and soul.

Toward midnight, another change in the weather took place. Huge clouds continued flying through the heavens, until the moon was nearly obscured. A black, threatening mass of vapor overspread the sky, and in a few moments a hail-storm commenced! This lasted but a short time, yet an incredible quantity of enormous hailstones fell like bullets upon the rock and prairie. This was a most timely god-send, and came near convincing Summerfield that Providence does sometimes step aside to favor his erring children; but when his mind was about to turn, he received a stunning crack from one that changed the nature of his thoughts entirely. Seth was fortunate enough to be struck by a couple that set him dancing like a madman for a few moments. He, however, in obedience to Summerfield's suggestion, collected all that could be found, and preserved them until they should melt into water, in a large hollow in the rock.

Again the storm passed and the struggling uncertain light of the moon was seen at intervals through the sweeping clouds. Summerfield peered downward and saw that the Indian bodies were gone. They had been taken away during the darkness of the storm.

Slowly and painfully the night wore away, and at last the welcome light of morning illumined the prairie. The watch-fires slumbered, and the Indians congregated again into one body and held another consultation. Redzel was in the costume of a savage, and could only be distinguished from the others when he was comparatively near the fugitives. He generally managed to keep himself moving among the others, so that it was about impossible for them to gain a shot at him.

Wandaught remained on duty while Vic turned and distributed the morning meal. All felt considerable hunger and partook heartily.

"Eat away, my little one," said he, noticing that Viola hesitated, "no matter ef 'tis the last. We wont die *that* way."

"How then? by thirst?" she questioned.

"No; nor *that* way either."

Summerfield and Seth looked to him for an explanation, and he answered:

"That's nobody goin' to set roostin' up here like we just have, 'nother night. Ef we're here when it gets dark agin, afore it gets light agin we're goin' to be down thar," he said, with a meaning gesture.

"Do you mean that, instead of waiting for them to attack you, you will attack them?" asked Viola, amused, in spite of herself, at his manner.

"That's the talk, my little one. How'd you like it?"

"Well enough, for I suppose it must come to that sooner or later; but it seems a mad venture for four of you to rush among nearly ten times that number."

"I've ventured greater things than that in my day."

"But," remarked Summerfield, "I can't help thinking they will make a final effort, and the crisis will come sooner than you anticipate."

"P'raps so!" returned Vic, vigorously chewing a huge piece of buffalo meat.

"I'll be darned if I don't ache mightily," observed Seth, as if a new thought had struck him. "This lopping around so on these stones don't agree with my constitution—"

"It didn't once!" interrupted Vic, with a sly twinkle.

"I'd like to git off, if possible, without fighting; but I have come to the conclusion that it can't be helped; and being it can't be helped, why the sooner it is done the better. Them's my sentiments."

At this point, Vannoven rose and exchanged

places with Wandaught, who seated himself and commenced eating with a cheerful countenance.

"I suppose you are aware," said Summerfield, "that Vic intends to attack those fellows to-night, if we remain here till that time?"

"Yas, I heerd you talkin', and have come to that c'lusion myself."

"Do you not think, Jim, they will attack us before that time?"

"No, sar; they won't do no such thing. They got 'nough of that yist'day, and 'll now try to starve us out."

"Ah!" exclaimed Seth, his eyes lighting up at this intelligence.

"That's their idee, and the only way we kin help it is to tumble down thar and make a scatterin' among 'em."

The pointed remarks of Wandaught made each thoughtful for a time. Seth sat cross-legged, gazing mechanically at each piece of meat that entered his mouth, which operation was so spirited that he seemed as if continually bowing to himself. Summerfield sat apart with Viola.

"Here, Jim, you're wanted this way; you too, Somefield," called Vic from his lookout.

"What's up?" asked Wandaught.

"They want to hold a gabble, I b'leve."

"Oh, I see. Here, George, you must do the talkin'."

Redzel was standing a short distance off, holding a fluttering rag, fastened to a stick, as a signal that he wished to make some communication with those above. Summerfield saw that he held his rifle in one hand.

"Make him drop that before you hear him," said Seth.

"I guess there is no danger," said Summerfield, hesitatingly.

"Make him drop it," added Vic, in a manner that said there was no need of questioning the propriety of such a requirement.

"See here, Redzel," spoke Summerfield, stepping out to view. "What do you mean by retainin' that rifle?"

"Retainin' that rifle?" he repeated, holding it out at arm's length, and gazing contemptuously at it. "Retainin' that rifle? Don't mean nothin', of course."

"Well, then, for the appearances of things place it a few feet from you upon the ground. I hold no arms, and it is no more than just to require the same thing of you."

"Never mind that. I was just going to ask if—"

"Redzel, do you intend to hold that rifle while you speak?"

"In course I does. As I's sayin'—"

"Then I shall hold no communication with you," returned Summerfield, stepping back from view.

"Wal, I'll doot then, bein' it's you," said Redzel, hastily muttering an oath at the same time that did not escape the ears of those above. Summerfield looked down again, and saw that he had laid it at his feet.

"Step ten feet away from that," called he to him.

"D—d pertic'lar!" replied he, sullenly moving three or four feet from it. Summerfield noticed these suspicious manifestations, but concluded to listen to the communication.

"Well," said he, "I am now ready to hear what you have to say."

"Fust, I want to know whether you mean to stick it out?"

"If you knew more than a fool you wouldn't asked that question, Redzel."

"Next, I want to know how long you think o' stickin' thar?"

"That depends on circumstances—just as the notion takes the rest. Perhaps we will descend and give you a call during the day. Perhaps not until to-morrow."

"Yas, do; we'd be glad to see you."

"Hardly as glad, I suppose, as your friends that spent part of the night where you are now standing," said Summerfield, with a cutting sarcasm.

Redzel winced, in spite of himself, beneath this pointed thrust, but rallied quickly.

"We'd be glad to see you, anyhow; don't miss comin'."

"You needn't fear; Seth, here, wants to make a closer acquaintance with you. He says he would like the fun of thrashing you again."

This brought an oath from Redzel, too fearful to transcribe in this place. He replied:

"I'll give him the chance, and you, too, if you want it."

"But this has nothing to do with the busi-

ness on hand. Have you anything more to ask or give?"

"I'll just state my intentions, that's all. You've got that gal up thar, and I hain't chased her this fur fur nothin'. I didn't bring a lot of friends to the mountains, and then foller her out here for nothin'. I'm bound to have her, and if you don't come down from thar, we'll starve you down. Ef you're a mind to give her and Crooked Pegs up, I'll say nothin' to the rest; but ef you don't, I'll do what I said. That's all."

"Provided, Redzel, you can. There is no use in bandying words. I will not enlarge upon your virtues, Sam. What if Wandaught did save your neck from the hangman several times; what if he kept your cowardly hair from your 'friends'; of course, if he undertakes to protect an innocent being from as foul a wretch as ever breathed, of course, I say, you ought to hunt him down like a dog. This, you know, is just. I will not say anything, Sam, except I am pretty firmly convinced that you have no sense, or you would never come here to prate as you are now doing."

"Then you don't agree to what I offer?" questioned Redzel, eagerly, moving stealthily nearer his rifle.

"Never ask again, for you always will be told no!" replied Summerfield, stepping quickly and quietly back from view.

"By thunder?" exclaimed Seth, in a half whisper, "you missed getting a hole through you that time by a close rub."

"That's so," added Vic, "if you'd stood 'nother second you'd 've tumbled back. That feller meant sunkthin' by bringin' his shooter with him. Sam'll do anything, and the meaner a thing the sooner."

"He has got to be shot afore he's out of our way," said Wandaught. "He'd follow Summerfield and Viola to the States ef they should git away from him now, and stick 'em both some night. I'm sorry, but I'm sure now, to git out of his way, we've got to git him out of our way fust."

Nothing worth recording transpired through the day. No attack was made, and it was plain that Redzel intended to follow out his threat to the very letter. The savages remained at a good distance, some reclining upon the ground, others lounging leisurely about, and all disposed to enjoy themselves as best they might. In the afternoon, Vic and Wandaught commenced firing at the Indians, and succeeded in picking off several. Seth saw one leap and grasp the air, that he was certain was Redzel; but Wandaught assured him that it was not; and the savages finding how much they were exposed withdrew well beyond their reach. The weather remained cold and windy, and finally a raw, gloomy night settled over the prairie.

Redzel, feeling confident that no attempt would be made to escape during the night, had but one fire kindled; yet, with customary caution, a number of the Indians prowled around the rock to see that the fugitives endeavored to carry out no plan they might have concerted. All but Summerfield took their stations again. He, seeing that his presence was not needed, seated himself beside Viola. While conversing with her, he noticed that the two hunters were talking together in a low and earnest tone. When they ceased, Vannoven stood a few moments buried in deep thought, and then facing around, said:

"Boys, we've a chance, and it's time to take it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FRIENDS AND SOMETHING MORE.

SUMMERFIELD and Seth gazed up in astonishment. They knew that some new and unexpected scheme had been decided upon from his manner, and that immediate action had been determined. Wandaught commenced walking slowly and cautiously around the edge of the rock, scrutinizing every foot of ground that was possible.

"Yas, boys," said Vic, "thar's a new idea 'round. We've got neighbors not far off, besides these chaps down here. Jist stand up here and you kin see."

As he spoke, he arose and pointed out upon the prairie. It was so dark that they could just follow the line of his finger; and following this they saw, far away, a small, bright fire burning, appearing in the distance but a small brand or point of flame; yet they knew it was

the camp-fire of some body of persons, for the rays from it came over the plain, like the moon's light upon the water. After gazing steadily at this a moment or two, they turned their eyes toward the fire of Redzel, which was in a slightly different direction. Several forms were visible around this, stretched, in apparent sleep, upon the earth, but all else was shrouded in the impenetrable darkness.

"Do yer see that, little one?" asked Vic.

"Yes, very distinctly," she returned.

"Wal, let's squat agin, and I'll tell yer what's to be done."

And doing this, he proceeded:

"That fire off thar b'longs to either redskins or whites, and I opine to the whites, coz ef they war Engins, these down here would've found 'em out by this time; but ef they war whites, they'd let 'em go, fur they've got thar hands full now. Jim says they're white, too, and the idee is this—one of us can git away from here easy enough, and we must git out thar and bring 'em down here, and we'll have some tall times here to-morrer. As Crooked Pegs, here, am so good in gittin' over the ground, I think he's the chap to go."

"Them's my sentiments exactly!" responded Seth, enthusiastically, starting up as though he were to go the next moment.

"Wait; set down," said Vic, "thar's no need of bein' in a hurry. Now, as you're goin', we'll fix up matters. You kin git away from here easy 'nough, but in course you've got to be sly 'bout it. Wal, hyer's what yer to do: When you git outside of these things, dig like mad fur the camp. I guess you kin see it from the ground, but ef you can't, don't matter, 'cause you know which way to go, and kin see it after trampin' a little. When you git thar, ef they're white, bring 'em down; ef they're red, in course, let 'em go. Jist fore you start back with 'em throw some of the fire up, so we'll know all is right, and you've started; and when you git out close by, jist give that whistle of yourn, to let us know you're 'bout; we'll be 'spectin' yer then."

While Vic was speaking, Seth stood panting like a restrained hound, so anxious seemed he to be off upon his way. As the trapper paused he started off like an arrow.

"H'yer!" called Vic, impatiently, "what's the matter? You don't want yer shooter. Jist see that yer knives are all right, and then dig. You'd better not go down thar, as they mought be lookin' for some of us, but jist drop over by Jim."

"Now, Seth, be careful," said Viola, impressively placing her hand upon his shoulder.

"Don't be afraid for me," he returned cheerfully.

"And be cautious in approaching the strangers, whoever they may be," added Summerfield.

"Ef these chaps down here should happen to catch you," said Wandaught, earnestly, as Seth stood by his side, "jist raise an all-fired yell, and we'll be down thar and bring an end to this botherin'."

Seth paused a second, waiting for what else was to be said, and then, uttering a quick "good-by," leaped quickly and fearlessly over and disappeared. Wandaught gazed down after him and saw him rise unhurt and steal noiselessly away in the darkness; and as the fugitives listened a long time, and heard no unwonted commotion among the savages below, they knew that Seth was safely upon his way toward the distant camp-fire.

As has been said, Redzel and the Indians had little fear of the fugitives attempting a flight, and, in fact, abandoned nearly all the precaution they had taken heretofore to prevent it. Consequently Seth had not much difficulty in eluding them, although he passed several times in close proximity to one or two Indians. But, in twenty minutes from starting, he was out upon the prairie, bounding over it like a shot from a cannon. He had been so confined and cramped for the last few hours that he felt a luxury in running and leaping again at freedom, and the enjoyment was delicious. He tried his usual canter, then a peculiar trot original with himself, and then wheeling suddenly around without checking his speed in the least, continuing his running backward, lifting his heels as though he were going up hill. This, however, was dangerous, for, striking some obstruction, he well nigh dislocated his neck in a fall that followed. He felt an almost ungovernable desire to give several shouts or yells, but had enough prudence to restrain himself; but his antics were too wild and wayward to be described here.

In the course of half an hour, he was as near

the camp-fire as he durst approach. It was burning vigorously, but he could not detect a single being around it. He discerned several bundles, or imagined he did, partly in its light, but he could not make out a single one. He made a complete circle around the camp, and even then had not seen a human being. This puzzled him considerably. Plunging his hands into his pocket, spreading his feet apart, and dropping his head, he commenced ruminating upon the wisest course to follow. Before he had formed any conclusion, he was startled by the commanding question:

"White or red?"

"White—white as gun-flints!" he returned, instantly approaching the fire. As he did so, a couple of forms came from opposite directions in the darkness, and stood around him. One was a large, massive, loose-jointed, bony specimen, full six feet in height, who held a monstrous rifle in one hand, and a huge piece of tobacco in the other, from which he twisted a prodigious mouthful as unconcernedly as though he saw no one before him. Seth gazed wonderingly at his gigantic frame, and, with his instinctive knowledge of human nature, rightly concluded that he was an honest-hearted hunter and trapper; and, as he noticed his ponderous shoulders and great swelling chest, he felt he had already gained a valuable ally. He had large innocent eyes, a broad but pleasant mouth, a homely nose, and a few straggling, yellow hairs upon his unshaven face. He was an individual, as he termed himself, "extensively laid out."

The other was a man of about the medium size, with a smooth, cheerful face, bright, pleasant eyes, and a peculiar ease and gracefulness of motion that made his impression always favorable at first. Seth also noticed another person, who had risen to the sitting position as the others had gathered around, and he observed, too, that he himself was regarded with interest and no evidence of mistrust.

"Wal, friend," said the second mentioned individual, "what's the story?"

"Well, quite a considerable one. In the first place, I will introduce myself. I am Seth Potter, Esq., and was born some years since in the town of Lubec, state of Maine. I am a delegate, or, more properly, a committee, elected by a unanimous vote, without a dissenting voice, to confer with you, and that is my business at present. The truth is this, friends, you have all seen that big rock some miles off, haven't you?"

"Yes," returned they, interested in his narration.

"Well, three or four days ago, me and three other gentlemen got chased by Engins, and were drove up there, where we have been ever since. There's thirty or forty of them, camped around that rock, led on by a white devil. They have tried to get up among us two or three times, but can't come it, and have made up their minds to starve us out. They have got our horses, so we can't run away, and, you see, we're in a scrape. Well, we'd concluded to do something mighty despirit, when one of our chaps happened to set eyes upon your fire here, and made up his mind you were white, and nominated me, on account of my superior qualities, to visit you, and I'm here for that purpose."

"Didn't I tell yer, Jake," said the smaller person, addressing the larger, "there's sunk-thin' wrong up that way, just afore dark?"

"Y-a-s, b'leve yer did say sunk'in' or other 'bout it," replied the Hoosier, discharging a mouthful of tobacco-juice in the fire, thereby blacking a large quantity of the glowing embers.

During Seth's narration, a third person had arisen to his feet, a finely-formed, middle-aged man, with a melancholy expression upon his countenance, who regarded Seth with much interest.

"Wal, friend," continued the smaller man, addressing Seth, "you're in trouble, and in course, we're bound to be in it too. We are ready to go with yer, ain't we, boys?"

"Y-a-s!" drawled the larger man, taking another chew.

"Will you go with us?" asked Seth of the man who had not as yet spoken.

"Of course," he returned, in a softened voice. "It would be criminal not to assist friends when hard pressed, as you say you are."

"Well, s'pose we tramp, then!"

With this the four started, after replenishing the fire and visiting their animals, which were

picketed but a short distance off. Seth led them, and was as loquacious as usual as long as there was no probability of his being overheard by any of his enemies.

In the meantime, Wandaught and the others had kept their eyes continually upon the distant camp-fire. Viola stood beside him, also watching it. Suddenly he turned to her, and asked:

"Vily, are yer peepers good?"

"Why, yes; I believe so," she answered.

"Why did you ask that question?"

"Wal, I want yer to watch that fire, to see whether yer don't see nothin'."

She kept her eyes upon it, as also did Summerfield and Vic most of the time. A long time after, Wandaught asked:

"Have any of you see nothin'?"

"I have discerned the fire, that is all?" answered Viola.

"That is all I have seen," said Summerfield.

"I hain't seen nothin' more nor that," Vannoven also added.

"Wal, ole Jim's peepers am the best, then," said Wandaught, pleasantly, "fur I've seen Crooked Pegs throw a piece of fire up into the air three times, and none of you hain't seen nothin' of it."

All admitted that the power of Wandaught's keen orbs was wonderful. Vic said he "allers knowed he could see jist as fur as he's a mind to," and Summerfield who had heretofore had some doubts of their being superior to his own, freely admitted their superiority.

An hour after, when there was a deathly stillness over the prairie, the fugitives heard the suppressed signal of Seth. Wandaught returned it, and a few minutes after he and Summerfield saw several dark forms at the base of the rock.

"All right!" whispered Wandaught.

An instant after, Seth with two or three bounds stood among them; then came the Hoosier, who appeared to absolutely take but one straddle to reach the top; then the elderly one, who clambered noiselessly up, and finally the smaller person, who came up as nimbly and quickly as a panther.

"Wal, friends," said the latter, cheerfully, as he stood among them, "we're here to help yer."

"And we're most mighty glad you've come," said Vic, approaching and extending his hand.

As the person addressed took his hand, he looked closely at him, and asked:

"Ain't this Vic Vannoven?"

"That's my handle, but you've got the best of me. I don't know yours."

"Now, don't yer?" asked the stranger, in a clear, half feminine voice, and with a suppressed laugh.

Vic bent forward, and scrutinized his features as closely as he could in the darkness.

"I've heard that voice," he repeated, slowly. Yes, skin me," he exclaimed, starting back. "Is that you, KIT CARSON?"

"That's my name," he returned, enjoying the start of wonder among the others.

"What! are you Kit Carson?" asked Seth, hardly believing his senses.

"Yes; that's my name, I b'lieve."

"Darned if I hain't read about you in the newspapers. Guy! I didn't think I'd ever see you. They say you're something uncommon."

"Let me make you 'quainted with my friends," said Carson. "This feller is Jake Gavin, from Illinois; and this is a friend that's goin' back to the States."

Vannoven grasped each of their hands and returned the cordial pressure, and in turn introduced his own company.

"I s'pose you know this chap," said he, alluding to Seth, "so I'll pass him. Do you know Jim Wandaught, Kit?"

"I b'lieve not."

"Wal, this ar him. He's a good beaver, but wont shake paws."

Wandaught returned the salutation of each, and then resumed his place as sentinel.

"This are George Somefield."

"Glad to see you!" said Carson, taking his hand. Summerfield felt honored, indeed, as he grasped the soft palm of the most renowned Indian fighter the world ever produced. He answered him gracefully, and then shook hands with the Hoosier, who gave a brief "How'r yer?" and with the other man, who seemed little disposed to converse.

"How do you do?" said Seth, approaching Carson, determined to enjoy the privilege the others had. Carson answered him good-humoredly, and shook his hand warmly.

Vic turned to introduce Viola, but she had withdrawn to her nook.

"Wal, Vic, what's to be done?" asked Carson, turning toward him.

"We're treed, you see, Kit?"

"You four fellers treed by a few red-skins!" repeated Carson, with sarcasm in his tone.

"We wouldn't've been if we war alone; but, you see, a woman's in the matter," answered Vic, pointing toward Viola.

"Oh, that's it!" said Carson, lowering his voice, with his natural gallantry, and gazing toward her.

"You see," said Vic, speaking confidentially, "we're bound to take care of her. We got her away from that cussed white snake, and he's been follerin' us a week to git her. Ef we'd bin alone, we'd've blowed him to blazes fore this, but we darsen't leave her to do it, the way things stand now. But, bein' you're here, we'll drop down on 'em in the mornin', and there'll be the tallest kind o' fun."

"How long yer been here?"

"This ar the second night."

"Don't you want sunkthin' revivin' like?"

"Wouldn't mind it, that's a fact."

"Here, Jake!" called Carson. "A little spirits is wantin'."

The Hoosier approached and produced from some unseen pocket a capacious flask of brandy, which he handed to Vic. He took several swallows, and passed it to Wandaught, who, in turn, handed it to the others. Seth took a rather large quantity, for it was a long time since he had tasted spirits. Summerfield approached Viola, and compelled her to take a small quantity, for he knew she needed it as well as himself. After this it was returned to the owner with its contents seemingly undiminished.

Carson, Vic, and Wandaught, remained on duty during the night, while the others disposed themselves as best they could.

Nothing of note occurred during the night. Redzel kept his fire burning brightly, and when some Indian approached and replenished it, he seemed to be the only living object in the neighborhood, so still and gloomy was everything around. The camp-fire of Carson could be seen until near morning, when it died out. He and Vic remained in earnest conversation the whole night, interrupted now and then by quiet draughts from the friendly flask that had served them once before. They were old acquaintances and friends, and enjoyed each other's society as only two genuine trappers can. Vannoven seemed to have entirely lost all antipathy to the companionship of his fellow-beings that he evinced when we first made his acquaintance. The prospect of the next day's occurrences, added to the effects of the flask referred to, made another person of him.

Wandaught acted strangely. He sat at some distance from them, hardly moving or speaking through the whole night. He refused to partake of the brandy, and seemed to wish that he might be left entirely to himself.

Finally morning dawned upon them, and there was a movement among the Indians below. But as they beheld the forms upon the rock, they concluded that all was right, and sunk back again into a sort of half sluggish, indifferent slumber. Redzel was not seen.

Summerfield was the first to arise. He greeted Wandaught warmly, but receiving no reply, approached and laid his hand familiarly on his shoulder. The trapper turned and muttered a good morning, then lay down upon the spot where Summerfield had spent the night, and in a few moments was asleep. Summerfield passed on and greeted Vic and Carson, each of whom returned his salutation with much friendliness and pleasure.

A few minutes after, the Hoosier slowly arose, and deliberately stretched his great body, with a yawn that sounded like the groan of some dying animal. His next movement was to place his hand in his pocket for his old friend the flask. Not finding it there, he started, with the exclamation:

"Whar's my gun?"

Hearing a laugh from Vic, he turned in that direction, and received it from him. He manifested no ill nature at having been deprived of it, but merely took a strong pull, replacing it in his capacious pocket, he stepped to the wall, and leaning lazily over it, gazed down.

A few moments after, Summerfield felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and looking up, saw the middle-aged man spoken of standing by his side. There was a deathly paleness

upon his features, and his whole system was terribly convulsed by emotion.

"What is her name?" he asked, pointing his quivering finger toward the sleeping form of Viola.

"Viola Vennond," returned Summerfield.

"O God! so I thought," he added, turning yet paler, as if fainting. Summerfield sprang forward and caught him.

"What is the meaning of this? What is she to y-u?" asked he, eagerly.

"She is my daughter!" he returned, recovering himself.

"How is this?" asked Summerfield, hardly knowing what he said.

"Why plain enough. I am her father."

At this point Viola awoke.

"Ask her to come here," said the man, in a pleasing tone, at the same time turning his back toward her.

"Viola, step this way a moment," called Summerfield. She tripped lightly forward, her radiant form all aglow with pleasure.

"Let me introduce you to your father."

"What is that?"

Summerfield made no reply, for her father had turned his face toward her. Viola's face flushing a moment as she gazed bewilderingly into his face, and the next instant she sprang forward and was clasped in his arms. Their joy was too great for utterance, and their mutual sobs were all that was heard. Summerfield turned away, not wishing to interfere with or interrupt such a scene. The others, who had witnessed it, comprehended its meaning, and showed their participation in their pleasure by a respectful silence.

"Gosh a'mighty! what's the matter?" questioned Seth, starting up and gaping wonderingly at them.

"The little one is dead, and he's tryin' to revive her," replied Vic, gravely.

"Here, you, you can't do her any good that way," said Seth, earnestly, striving to separate them. But Summerfield pulled him quietly to one side and admonished him to let them alone.

As the father released the daughter, the others removed their gaze, and permitted them to seat themselves without being interrupted by any rude stare of theirs. They remained seated full an hour, engaged in earnest, thrilling conversation. Viola related the whole particulars of her life since their mutual separation up to the present moment, not omitting a single particular that she could recall. And the father stated the principal incidents of his. He had remained in Oregon a number of years, succeeding better than he anticipated, until he determined to send for his daughter to come to him. He had sent for her, and hearing nothing of her for a long time, made up his mind to visit the States himself. When about to start, he felt such a desire to leave the new country he was in, and spend the remainder of his days in his native state, that he disposed of his possessions and set out with that intention. He accompanied a number of emigrants returning, discouraged and gloomy, to their homes again. They proceeded so slowly, that he could hardly restrain his impatience, and gladly joined a couple of trappers who overtook them one day. He had been with them but three days when he discovered his long lost daughter. A short time more was spent in conversation, when the father arose and addressed the others.

"My friends, you will pardon this exhibition of feeling which I have given, when I explain it. Little did I dream last night, when I reached this spot, that I had found my long-lost daughter, whom I had not seen for years. However, such was the fact, and a short time since, for the first time, I was made aware of it. I have not concealed the heavenly, the perfect joy which it has given me. She has told me the whole circumstances of the noble interest you have manifested in her behalf. I cannot thank you now as I should, but I will assure you, Mr. Vannoven, Mr. Potter, and the friend who lies sleeping there, that, when we reach the States again, I will manifest my gratitude in a more substantial way than by bare naked thanks. And, Mr. Summerfield, from the depths of my overflowing heart, I thank you deeply, earnestly and fervently; for, to you four, under Heaven, is the preservation of my daughter owing. I see that you meditate some immediate action. Let it not be delayed longer, and let me assist you in carrying it out. Pray, say nothing," he added, as Summerfield and Vic were about to speak. "I appreciate everything you have done, and

do not wish you to depreciate it, as seems your intention."

"But let me say," persisted Summerfield, "that I deserve no thanks. I have done nothing. These three others have saved my life and your daughter's also."

"See here, Summerfield," interrupted Vic, "et you tell 'nuther such whopper as that, I'll pitch you headfirst over fur the varmints down thar."

"I understand it all," said Mr. Vennond, smiling at these remarks.

"I'll do it!" added Vic, with a threatening motion of his head.

"It seems to me," observed Seth, "that it's getting time to do something. The Engines down below, and Mr. Redzel, will get out of patience."

"Mr. who?" asked Vennond, with a start.

"Mr. Sam Redzel, the gentleman that's trying to cut me and Mr. Summerfield out of your daughter's affections."

"He is the one who has pursued her thus far, and to whom she has referred, without mentioning his name?"

"The same."

"I understand everything now. It was not all love and passion that has led him to follow you thus far. It was vindictive hatred, revenge!"

"What do you mean, father?" asked Viola, earnestly.

"Never mind, darling. It is not a story for your ears. At any rate not until Sam Redzel, your mortal enemy, is dead. But go on, friends. What is the intention, Carson?"

"We're goin' to make a rush down among 'em—"

"Hallo! up thar!" came the voice of Redzel at this moment. Carson paused, and Vic gazed down to see what was wanting.

"What's Jim Wandaught?" he asked.

"He's here. What do you want to know for?"

"I want to talk with him a moment."

Accordingly Summerfield stooped and gently awoke Wandaught, and communicated the intelligence to him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PRESENTIMENT'S FULFILMENT.

As soon as Wandaught understood what was wanted, he sprang without hesitation upon the wall, his fine muscular form standing out in relief against the sky. Seth, out of curiosity, looked over, and seeing that Redzel held his rifle in his hand, whispered:

"Jim, make him drop that gun before you talk to him."

"You'd better do't," added Vic.

"Sartainly, friend, don't stand that," joined Carson, and Summerfield also said:

"For Heaven's sake, Wandaught, don' run into such danger as that."

But Wandaught, instead of receiving these friendly warnings as he would at any other time, appeared slightly touched and displeased that all should offer advice to him, and, without following their entreaties, simply returned: "Sam won't do nothin' mean to me."

The others said nothing more, and the trapper turned his face toward Redzel, and demanded:

"Wal, Sam, what you want of me?"

"Jim, I wants to ax one favor."

"Wal, out with it; if I kin give it, I will."

"In the fust place, me and you are old friends, ain't we?"

"In course, and I hope we allers will be."

"We've been together considerable?"

"That's a fact, and I've done you some good turns, hain't I?"

"Yeah; and I've allers felt good 'eal of gratitude fur it."

"Glad to hear it."

"And I don't want to quarrel with yer, Jim, nuther."

"Nor me with you; but what's yer favor you've been talkin' 'bout?"

"Wal, Jim, bein' you'n me are such fast friends, I want to ask yer if you won't do yer best to put that gal and Crooked Pegs in my hands! Cuss it! I'm tired of waitin'; I mought as well had her the last two, three days and nights I've been here."

There was a suppressed laugh from those behind Wandaught when they heard this. He answered:

"Sam, I want ter ax yer one favor."

"Wal, what is it, my ole friend?"

"I don't want yer to ever ax me that agin."

"Why don't yer want that ax'd?"

"'Cause it won't do no good."

"What, won't yer grant me that little favor?"

"Why, Sam, would it be the right thing?"

"Ar' yer goin' ter grant it?" he interrupted, impetuously.

"I told you no, fur if I did—"

Wandaught's words were interrupted at this point by the sharp crack of a rifle, and, placing his hand to his breast, he stepped quietly down, saying:

"I'm done for, boys!"

As they saw the deathly ghastliness of his face, and the crimson blood dribbling through his fingers, they understood all. Summerfield sprang forward, and, catching him in his arms, asked what he knew was the truth:

"My God! Wandaught, are you shot?"

"Yas; I've got my last shot; but don't make any fuss over it. It can't be helped."

And the trapper, refusing all assistance, seated himself upon his blanket, and reclining a second, finally lay down with one hand beneath his head, as though he were sleeping. During the movement, a sharp cloud of pain brushed over his features, and his hand was displaced from the wound in his breast. A streaming gush of blood bubbled out when it was removed, and he vainly endeavored to stay it. Vennond and Summerfield sprang forward and did their best to assist him.

The two closed hands, and each turned their heads. Vannoven never saw him again in this world. He stepped away, carefully shading his face, but his herculean strength and will could not conceal his terrible emotion.

"And now, Vily, a good-by to you. I have died for you, but I would die agin a hundred times for such a dear, sweet, little creature. Once in a while think of old Wandaught, when he's gone, and when you git up above ax to see me the fust one. Good-by."

"Good-by. Oh!—"

She could say no more, but returned the strong grasp of the rough hand that held hers. Her eyes were full of scalding, blinding tears. She felt the pressure suddenly increase, and as she cleared her vision, she gazed into Wandaught's eyes. And thus, with their eyes upon each other, without the slightest stir, except from one or two sobbing around, or a word from any one, the soul of the trapper departed.

Departed, we fondly believe, for a better region than it left. Had Jim Wandaught been as are generally those of his class—had he deferred calling upon his Maker until the eleventh hour, we might doubt it. But it was not thus with him. Little did he know of God and his attributes, as we understand him; never since a mere child had he visited a house of worship; yet, in the great wilderness, with no human being near, he had seen and felt an invisible Power, and his simple heart had gone up in earnest adoration. In the silent midnight hour he had lain and watched the gorgeous constellations of Heaven, and felt that the same Power held them in their places. In the wild perils of his life, something told him that his preservation was due to no strength of his own; and the memory of a sainted mother, that had told him, away back in the sinless days of childhood, of a wonderful region of happiness that he might visit at some time, had never been forgotten. His hand had more than once been restrained by no will of his own, and the gentle voice of conscience was ever heard. And we repeat, that we believe his spirit is at this moment within that glorious clime.

Summerfield and Vennond were the only ones beside Viola who saw him die. She did not realize it, and looked up inquiringly to her father, as she saw how filmy and glassy Wandaught's eyes had become.

"He is dead," he answered softly.

Then she gently lifted his head from her lap, and Summerfield and her father carried the inanimate form to the wall, and there depositing him tenderly upon his blanket, covered his form with another, and, without speaking, turned to Carson and Vannoven to see what was to be done next. The latter had choked back his grief, and there was a terrible calmness upon his features.

"Sam Redzel must pay for that," he replied, in a tone that was awful from deep meaning. He then turned to Carson and conversed in a half-whisper for a moment, and it was evident from their appearance that they had agreed upon the course to pursue.

During this time, Seth stood with his arms

folded over the muzzle of his rifle, gazing stoically at the covering of Wandaught. Suddenly he turned around and spoke:

"Boys, I've one favor to ask of you. Jim was my friend. Sam Redzel has killed him, and swore that he'll have my life too. The first chance you see to shoot that viper, let me know. Let me do it, and that will be all I ask."

All promised that his wish should be gratified. On the side of the wall toward the savages were several orifices that were large enough to admit the barrel of a rifle, yet they were so irregular, and the wall was of such thickness, that the position of the gun could be raised but slightly. They had been constructed, it seemed, for the purpose of firing upon an enemy at some distance. As the savages were now congregated, they stood before this, and at the very point where a shot could be made to reach them. The Hoosier placed himself before one of the apertures and gazed intently upon them. It was hardly five minutes before he turned and exclaimed:

"Ha'r's yer chance!"

Seth sprang forward and peered through. There, directly before his vision, he saw Sam Redzel standing and pointing toward the rock, and gesticulating madly, as though giving directions to his savage allies. With hardly the slightest quiver, he pushed his rifle through, and, dropping upon his knee, took deliberate aim at the villain's breast. Every breath was held as his finger pressed the trigger. Seth fired quickly, and waited to see its effect. His nerves, in spite of his forced calmness, were somewhat unsteady, and the shot was not as good as he expected.

Yet it was mortal! As the smoke cleared away, he saw Redzel stagger a moment, fling his arms wildly above him, and, with a half howl and shriek, and an awful oath, pitch forward upon his face! He saw this, as did the others, and, with a calmness that was certainly singular, to say the least, he drew his rifle forth, and turning to Vannoven, said, in tones scarcely loud enough to be heard:

"I've killed him! What are you going to do next?"

"We're goin' to kill the rest," returned Vic. "Sposen we imbibe, friend."

The Hoosier produced his exhaustless flask, and each took a long draught. Vannoven then stepped to the opposite side, and, with the assistance of Carson, rolled a large stone from its place. This done, he spoke:

"We must hop down thar and make a rush. See that yer knives and shootin' irons are ready."

All signified their readiness, and, without more words, Vic dropped silently to the earth. Then came Carson, followed by Gavin, Vannond, Seth, and Summerfield. The latter paused a moment to speak to Viola. He assured her that the deciding blow had been given in the death of Redzel, and they were going to but finish the work, and that there was no fears of the result. He then leaped over.

The leadership, by mutual consent, had been given to Carson. He stood as calm and collected as though he were no avenger! Gazing around upon each, he spoke in that low musical voice of his.

"See that all is right. Blaze away as soon as you see 'em. Now!"

As he uttered the last word, he bounded away, and almost simultaneously six human forms shot around the rock, six rifles were discharged, and as many savages rolled writhing in their own blood! Then, like as many crazed animals, they bounded over the intervening ground, and in an instant were among their enemies raging like lions over their prey.

The battle was short, but so terrible that no pen can describe it. The savages, instead of withdrawing upon the fall of their leader, maintained their ground with determined obstinacy; and, at the moment the six whites burst upon them, were preparing for another attempt to dislodge the fugitives. The onslaught of the latter was so sudden that it was fatal. They were thrown into confusion, yet, in spite of it, made a bold stand, and struggled with the fury of desperation.

And thus it was contested, and thus it was gained. No earthly power could have withstood that charge of the whites. Seth Potter was so insane with excitement that he could never recall the slightest incident of the fight after hearing the command of Kit Carson. He grasped a savage the first one, and slew him as he would an infant, then sprang into the air

with a yell, and brandishing his rifle over his head, leaped upon another and bore him to the ground. Thus he fought, impelled by the uncontrollable passion that was burning him up.

Vannoven and Summerfield remained side by side, and fought with more coolness than any, yet there was a fierceness about their movements that never before possessed them.

The Hoosier went at it like some ponderous machine, working wildly from the excess of power that was driving him forward. He seemed to push instead of strike, and pull instead of jerk, yet no obstruction or impediment could avail against his irresistible strength. He appeared actually at times to crush and break the Indians in two! And all the time his huge jaw continued regularly closing upon an enormous mouthful of tobacco, and once or twice he ejected large quantities of juice in the face of his struggling victim!

Vic Vannoven, for the time being, was a demon in his fury. The first blow he made, he drove his knife through and through the body of an Indian; and, as it slipped from his grasp, he wheeled around and brought a blow with such force in the face of another, that it was absolutely crushed to a jelly! A terrific kick sent another a dozen feet, doubled up like a knot in his agony; and as he drew his other knife, he plunged deliriously at the others. His simple grasp appeared sufficient to mash the very bones of his enemies, and not a savage could stand for an instant before the raging madman.

And yet Kit Carson, the small, gentlemanly agent at Santa Fe, performed more incredible wonders than this! There was not the wild impetuosity in his movements that characterized those of Vannoven; but there was an inconceivable celerity and quickness, more fatal in its results than his. He fought with a knife in either hand, leaping in every direction with an agility that was astonishing, and unequalled by the others.

There is a feat that is sometimes performed by the trappers in the West upon horseback, yet few indeed are those who ever acquire the necessary dexterity to accomplish it. The trapper, in making his charge, takes a knife in each hand, and, lowering his head, urges his horse directly between two savages, and in the passage slays them both! Very few indeed can do this, and yet Kit Carson did it on foot? At two separate times he slew two of his enemies at the same instant.

Such terrible slaughter could not last long. In a few moments the remaining savages broke and fled. Eight only were able to avail themselves of this resource, and it availed yet nothing. As they leaped away, they were followed by Carson, the Hoosier, and Vannoven, who slaughtered them as they ran!

Summerfield, Vennond and Seth halted and drew breath as they saw not an Indian upon his feet. All were stretched before them, either dead or dying!

When they had rested, Summerfield arose and gazed after his companions; but the pursuit of the Indians had carried them beyond his sight, and he proposed to the others to await their return upon the rock. As they were starting, Seth said:

"Boys, I don't see that Redzel around here. Can't be he's run off with the others, and if he hasn't, where is he!"

They examined each form, and true enough indeed was it that Redzel was gone! All were puzzled to account for this. Seth, in his opinion of the villain, really believed the Evil One had assisted him bodily away. Summerfield, indeed, feared that Redzel had escaped, and that all trouble with him was not yet over.

Full of these feelings, the three approached the rock. Viola stood waiting them, and had witnessed all of the fearful contest. She had seen the fight of the savages and the pursuit, and knew that none of her friends had been slain. Yet the awful groans that reached her ears, and the terrible scenes she saw, prevented anything like a joyous feeling. She indeed was glad that the savages had been routed, but mourned deeply that it was accomplished by annihilation only.

As Summerfield passed around the rock, he recoiled with shivering horror at the sight that met his gaze. There, stretched upon the earth, lay the still gasping form of Redzel! He was bleeding profusely from the wound that Seth had given him. He had stopped the flow with his hand until he reached the rock, against which he crept! Hoping to die without being seen by any one. Singularly enough, his

wound was nearly in the same place as Wandaught's, varying enough only to prolong his torture. His hands and clothes were dabbled in his blood, and there was a ghastly horror in his appearance that was awful!

As his rolling eyes met those of the others, a sudden pang of the acutest torture shot over his features. All feelings of hatred or revenge were driven from the hearts of the observers as they gazed upon this sickening spectacle. Summerfield felt for the miserable wretch, and approached and asked, in a sympathizing tone:

"Can I do anything for you, Redzel?"

He made a strong effort to speak, but his mouth was too full of blood, and only a gurgling moan escaped him. He, however, motioned feebly with his left hand for Summerfield to remove his right, which was lying beneath him. He raised him tenderly, and as he pulled the hand forth, the dying wretch, gathering his strength, struck savagely at the breast of his friend, passing so close as to cut his garment! Seeing that he had failed, he fell back, with a half-uttered oath that sent the blood from his mouth in every direction, and gave up in despair.

"Kill the infernal snake!" exclaimed Seth, clubbing his rifle, and raising it to brain him upon the spot. Summerfield caught his arm.

"You are saved that trouble. He is dead!"

"He is with his Maker," said Vennond, solemnly. "We have nothing more to do with him."

They then ascended the rock, where Viola was anxiously awaiting them. She had seen Redzel crawling painfully toward, and had known, although she could not witness, that he had died near her.

As they reached the top of the rock, they looked out, and far away could see Vannoven returning. But he was alone, on horseback, and leading four others. This occasioned much wonderment, and none could account for it, except by the supposition that Carson and his companion were returning at some distance behind. But when Vic reined up beneath them, no other person was in sight.

"Where's Carson and Gavin?" asked Summerfield, looking down upon him.

"Half way to Independence by this time. Kit came 'cross some fellers, who said he war wanted most blastedly out thar, and he 'cluded to start without waitin' for us."

In the attack there had been a stampede of the animals belonging to the Indians, and they were flying over the prairie in every direction. The Hoosier secured a couple, upon which he and Carson continued their pursuit. Vic also secured one, upon which he was enabled to capture several others, and with which, as has been shown, he returned.

"Well," continued Summerfield, "how soon shall we leave?"

"Right off."

"We must bury Wandaught, you know, first."

At this Vic dismounted, and, securing his animals, ascended the rock. The form of the dead trapper was then lifted and borne gently down, followed by Viola. After a few minutes consultation, it was determined to bury him within a few feet of where he had been slain. Accordingly all set to work, and with much labor, scooped out a grave sufficiently deep to contain him. Into this he was placed, and, while the others bowed their heads in sorrow and reverence, Summerfield knelt and uttered a petition to high Heaven. This done, they commenced covering his body, and, as in a few minutes it was hid from their sight, not one could repress the tears that rose to his eyes. Not a word was spoken as the earth was packed over him, and when finished they turned toward Vannoven.

"Now git on," said he, "and let's leave this place."

"Wait a minute," said Summerfield, "let us give Redzel a burial also. We shall never regret it."

As he spoke, he passed around the base of the rock, and the others instinctively followed. Vic gave a perceptible start when he saw the frightful appearance the dead body presented. All set to work vigorously, and in a short time another grave was dug, into which Vennond and Summerfield deposited the form of Redzel. Neither Seth nor Vic would touch it.

And now occurred a most singular and unaccountable circumstance. Just as they stepped back to throw the earth again into the grave, all were startled by hearing the angry warning of the rattlesnake.

"Jump, boys," called Vic, "thar he comes!" All sprang away, and as they gazed back they saw a monstrous rattlesnake, nearly black in its hue, and whose swelling body seemed covered with glittering scales, slowly gliding from beneath the rock, and, with head erect, approaching them! All ran a short distance, and stood ready to shoot the reptile, and yet pausing through some peculiar feeling that took possession of them. What was their horror at seeing the animal, instead of coming nearer, suddenly dart into the grave of Redzel and coil himself around the body! They approached him, and he gave a warning rattle again, rearing his head in rage; but, without waiting, the others fired, sending several bullets through its neck and head. The contortions of the snake, though terrible, did not remove his body, and when he gasped out his life he was still lying upon the breast of Redzel.

"Bury them together," said Seth, "they're good companions."

"The idea is too horrible," replied Summerfield, placing the point of his rifle beneath the reptile and flinging him forth. The animal was dead, yet there was an involuntary motion in several parts of the body, and, as if to add unearthly horror to the scene, Seth affirmed that it resembled Redzel's dying movements!

This unpleasant duty finished, the company now made ready to take their leave of a place that had been so prolific with misery to them. No prayer was said over Redzel, for Summerfield felt that it would have been mockery to attempt it.

It was now near noon, and, without waiting to partake of any food, the company were soon en route for the States. Vic had found a good quantity of meat among the savages, which he hesitated not to appropriate to the use of his friends, so that there was nothing to fear in that direction.

When they departed, they turned their backs upon a heart-sickening scene. Scattered over a large surface of the prairie, were lying over a score of bodies, cut and mangled in every conceivable manner! There they were to lie until torn asunder by fierce animals, or until they had rotted beneath the blazing sun and chilly weather!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONSUMMATION

WHAT more is to be said? To all good stories there is a happy end—says the proverb.

Perhaps it is so: at least, we shall not say it is not so, even if by saying this we claim that our story is a good one. For, what could come out of these perils, these races for life, these episodes of hunter's life, and of heart-life, if not a happy consummation?

A few episodes, and all is told.

"Viola, do you remember a little talk we once had, under not quite so favorable circumstances?"

"Oh! yes, we had a great many pleasant chats, for all our situation was not as we might have wished," she replied, blushing slightly, and pretending not to comprehend him.

"That is true; but I refer to that one in the cave."

"When we made our way out. I don't think it was very pleasant."

"No, no; you little witch. I mean when we were all alone, and I asked you whether you would be my wife, and you said you would some day. Don't remember that, I suppose?"

"Let me see," she repeated slowly and reflectively, as though endeavoring to call up some forgotten circumstance, and yet unable to repress a smile at Summerfield's quizzical appearance. Ah! there was no danger of her forgetting that conversation. He waited a second, and then catching her impulsively in his arms, he added:

"You remember well enough; but it doesn't make much difference whether you do or not. I do, and, of course, will hold you to your promise."

Then releasing her, and imprinting a warm kiss upon a warmer cheek, he continued, in an earnest tone:

"Viola, your father has given me his consent, and you have. To-day I shall leave for home, and if I find my sister alive and well—as God grant I may—I shall visit your home and claim you at once. At any rate, you shall soon hear from me."

At this point, the little foolish creature went to crying. In a few moments, however, she looked up, more beautiful than ever, and smiling through her sparkling tears, asked:

"You will come, will you?"

"I guess so," returned Summerfield, giving another burning kiss, which was returned.

Shortly after, they were joined by Vennond, who understood everything, and laughed and joked them greatly, wondering what had grieved Viola so much, and made Summerfield so aglow with pleasure. And Viola tried to pout and couldn't to save her life, and at last Summerfield laughingly bade them good-by and departed, he for Eastern Missouri, they for Louisiana.

* * * * *

In the morning, Summerfield, accompanied by his sister, set out for Louisiana, and reached the residence of Viola the next day. As might be supposed, she and Marian were ardent friends at once. There was a great deal of unimportant talk, as there always is at such times, and at last the great wedding day was fixed by Marian and Viola.

And of the wedding it is perhaps useless to speak. Hundreds of others are daily taking place which are as much as was this one. The nuptials were celebrated at Viola's residence. Vic Vannoven, the hardy trapper, and Seth the eccentric fellow, were two important personages who were present. The former, at first, was embarrassed by the gorgeous splendor of the scene; but the others understood his nature, and succeeded in making him feel perfectly at home. He grew very loquacious, declaring that Viola "war as purty as a young beaver," and Summerfield, "wal, thar, he allers thought he's a blasted fine chap." Probably the excellent wine had some effect upon him, for, before the company broke up, at Seth's suggestion, he performed for the company a genuine Sioux war dance, without omitting a single howl or yell, and ended the matter by hugging Viola somewhat after the fashion of a grizzly bear, and kissing her eyes! His performance created much merriment, for they all knew his rough but generous nature.

Seth never remembered that he himself had once entertained a tender feeling for Viola; but joined in the proceedings with a gusto and heartiness equal to the trapper. He executed some marvellous gyrations in the dances he undertook, and showered his congratulations upon every one he spoke to. Nothing occurred to mar the pleasure of the evening, except an inadvertent remark of Vannoven's that, "ef Jim war thar, thar'd be a tall time, no mistake." This brought a tear to more than one eye.

Summerfield has just informed us that Vannoven has consented to give up his trapping life after one more journey. He says the plains have too many whites upon them, and the overland mail is spoiling the country, and there is not enough of beaver to pay for the trouble. He starts upon his journey in a few weeks, so that if our readers wish to know his whereabouts, they may conclude that, by the time this concluding chapter reaches them, he is somewhere up among the Rocky mountains, pursuing his exciting and dangerous vocation. Summerfield has informed him that he is going to be in the newspapers, and he intends returning as soon as possible to see how his name looks in print.

[THE END.]

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